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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 27 MARCH 2025 | THURSDAY | BENGALURU | 26 RAMADAN, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 84| Pages: 8

Inhuman: SC stays HC's 'groping not attempt to rape' ruling

Court asks Allahabad HC Chief Justice to act against judge

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Wednesday came down hard on Allahabad High Court's observations that grabbing of breast and pulling the string of a 'pyjama' do not amount to rape.

The Court stayed the judgement and said it depicted "total insensitiveness" and an "inhuman approach".

Terming it a "serious matter", the court directed the High Court chief justice to take "appropriate steps" against the judge,

A bench comprising justices Bhushan R Gavai and AG Masih stating that the judgement violated "canons of law" and demonstrated a "complete lack of sensitivity".

The top court had taken a suo motu cognisance in the matter after the controversial observations made by the high court was brought to the notice of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna by an organisation "We the Women of India".

"We are sorry to use such harsh words against the judge," the bench observed.

The apex court said it was not as if that the verdict was dictated at the spur of the moment in the court itself.

It noted that the High Court had reserved its verdict in November 2024 and after almost four months, the judgement was pronounced.

The bench said it was clear that the judge had authored the

Ram Manohar Narayan Mishra

verdict after application of mind.

The bench issued notice to the Centre, Uttar Pradesh government and the parties before the high court seeking their responses.

The bench then proceeded to put the judgment in abeyance and said the matter would be heard again after two weeks.

During the hearing, one of the advocates appearing in the matter said they have filed a petition challenging the High Court order.

The bench said the plea would be heard along with the suo motu proceedings.

The High Court's ruling, delivered on 17 March, had sparked nationwide outrage as it held that a man grabbing an 11-year-old girl's breasts, breaking the strings of her pyjama, and dragging her under a culvert did not amount to an attempt to rape. —*PTI*

SC JUNKS PLEA FOR CBI PROBE INTO HONEY TRAPPING IN KARNATAKA

Supreme Court dismissed a plea for a CBI probe into an alleged "honey-trap" attempt involving a minister and other politicians in Karnataka. A three-judge bench of Justices Vikram Nath, Sanjay Karol and Sandeep Mehta dismissed the PIL filed by social activist Binay Kumar Singh. The plea had also sought the probe to be either monitored by the top court or by a committee headed by a retired Supreme Court judge. Advocate Barun Kumar Sinha, appearing for the petitioner, said the allegation reported in the media required a thorough investigation against the persons behind it.

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SC REFUSES TO HEAR URGENT PLEAS FOR FIRs ON CASH AT HC JUDGE'S HOME

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused an urgent mentioning of a plea seeking a direction to Delhi Police to lodge an FIR over the alleged discovery of semi-burnt stash of cash from the residence of Delhi High Court judge Yashwant Varma. The petitioners said that if such a case was registered against a common citizen then several probe agencies, like the CBI and ED, would have been launched against person. "This is quite enough. The plea will come up accordingly," the bench asserted. "Don't make public statements," the CJI added. —*PTI*

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AMID BJP's OPPOSITION

Guv returns Greater B'luru Governance Bill for clarifications

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

In a setback to the Congress Government in Karnataka to revamp the civic administration, Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has returned the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill to the government seeking clarifications citing civic representations and opposition from BJP.

"'The Governor has sent the bill back seeking some clarifications. It will be sent to the Governor again with the clarifications for approval," Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said on Wednesday. The bill passed despite opposition from the BJP, proposes restructuring the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) by dividing it into a maximum of seven city corporations in the Greater Bengaluru Area.

It also suggests the formation of a Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) to oversee coordination and supervision, with a 30-month term both for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. According to the proposal, the GBA would be headed by the Chief Minister as the ex-officio chairperson, while the minister in charge of development of Bengaluru would be the ex-officio vice-chairperson.

Thaawarchand Gehlot

- "Clarification has been sought by the Governor on seven bills, four are with him and five have been sent to the President for assent," he said.

Addressing reporters here, he said since August 2023, a total of 119 bills have been passed so far, and out of these 83 bills have been notified as laws.

"Clarification has been sought by the Governor on seven bills, four are with him and five have been sent to the President for assent. Twenty bills are being sent to the Governor now," he said. —*PTI*

Trump lauds India's election system, to rehaul US process

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

President Donald Trump has cited India and Brazil in his executive order to overhaul the American election system, saying the two countries are linking voter identification to a biometric database while the US relies on self-attestation for citizenship. The sweeping executive order, signed by Trump on Tuesday, states that "despite pioneering self-government, the US now "fails to enforce basic and necessary election protections used by both developed and developing nations."The President also called for "free, fair, and honest elections unmarred by fraud, errors, or suspicion. —*PTI*

If Hindus are safe, Muslims will be safe too: Yogi

LUCKNOW, 26 MARCH

People from all religions are safe in Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said, adding that Muslims are safe if Hindus are safe. Yogi said a Muslim family would feel safe among a hundred Hindu families but not vice versa. In an ANI podcast, Adityanath, said 50 Hindus cannot feel safe among 100 Muslim families and cited the situation in Bangladesh, which has witnessed several attacks on minorities and temples in recent months. He stated how Hindus and temples have faced multiple attacks by Muslims in Bangladesh. He also mentioned the Pakistan and Afghanistan's situations as examples. He emphasized how communal riots in UP stopped since BJP came into power in 2017. He said that if Hindu shops and houses were burned, then Muslim shops and houses will also face the same. He questioned the construction of mosques on "Hindu sites" stating it was against the Islamic principles.—*Agencies*

BJP expels BSY critic MLA Yatnal

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

- The MLA from Vijayapura was quite vocal against former Yediyurappa and Vijayendra for their "dynasty politics" and "corruption".

BJP has expelled its rebel MLA and strident Yeddyurappa critic Basanagouda Patil Yatnal from the party for six years, after issuing two showcause notices to him.

A bitter critic of BJP stalwart and former chief minister BS Yediyurappa and his son BY Vijayendra, Yatnal has been levelling "dynasty politics" charges against them. Vijayendra is BJP Karnataka Chief.

Responding to the BJP's Central Disciplinary Committee's (CDC) order, Yatnal said he has been expelled for speaking against dynasty politics and corruption.

The MLA from Vijayapura was quite vocal against former Yediyurappa and Vijayendra for their "dynasty politics" and "corruption".

Vijayendra termed Yatnal's expulsion an "unfortunate necessity".

"There has never been, nor will there ever be any compromise on discipline and ideology," Vijayendra said in a post on 'X'.

He said after thorough deliberation on recent developments within the party, a disciplinary action against Yatnal has been taken. "I have neither formally registered nor verbally expressed grievances with the party leadership about the recent events," he clarified. —*PTI*

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GPAY, PHONEPE DOWN AS INDIA SEES MAJOR UPI OUTAGE

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Digital transactions were impacted on Wednesday due to a widespread UPI outage with a large number of users reporting problems in the instant payment interface. The outage triggered a surge in complaints on Downdetector, a platform that monitors service disruptions based on user reports.

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) said the glitch was fixed within 30 minutes. "NPCI had faced intermittent technical issues owing to which UPI had partial decline. The same has been addressed now and the system has stabilised. Regret the inconvenience," the payment regulator said in a post on X. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant payment system developed and managed by the NPCI, an RBI-regulated entity built over the IMPS infrastructure and allows you to instantly transfer money without any user charge with auto debit facility and no-minimum transaction limit. —*PTI*

India trashes US panel report on religious freedom as 'biased'

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

India on Wednesday trashed a report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and said its "persistent" attempts to cast aspersions on the country's vibrant multicultural society reflect a "deliberate" agenda rather than a genuine concern for religious freedom.

In its 2025 annual report, the USCIRF alleged that religious freedom conditions in India continued to deteriorate as attacks and discrimination against religious minorities continued to rise and recommended to the US government to impose "targeted sanctions on individuals and entities, such as Vikash Yadav and RAW, for their culpability in severe violations of religious freedom by freezing their assets and/or barring their entry into the United States".

The US has charged Yadav, a former Indian government official, in the alleged foiled plot to kill Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun on American soil in 2023.

It also called for designating India as a "country of particular concern" or CPC, for engaging in and "tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA)". In its reaction, New Delhi described the report as "biased and politically motivated" and said the efforts to "undermine" India's standing as a beacon of democracy and tolerance will not succeed, adding the USCIRF should be designated as an "entity of concern". —*PTI*

T-Series blocks Kamra's video, comedian gets 2nd summons

NEW DELHI, 26 MAR

Comedian Kunal Kamra on Wednesday criticised Bollywood studio T-Series, alleging that his stand-up special 'Naya Bharat', was flagged for copyright violations on YouTube.

Kamra on Wednesday dropped a new video from the comedy special, in which he performed a parody of 'Hawa Hawai' from 'Mr India' to criticise Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The

songs belong to T-Series label.

The video has been blocked due to copyright restrictions and therefore is not visible to viewers. Due to copyright claims, the video will not be able to generate revenue as well. Meanwhile, the Mumbai Police sent him a second summons for his comments on Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

'NO ACTION TAKEN'

Despite BWSSB ban, illegal borewell digging rampant in Whitefield

SARAH FAZAL
BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Whitefield, Bengaluru's IT hub, is witnessing a surge in illegal borewell drilling, with frustrated residents complaining about authorities failing to take action. Over the past five months, borewells have been drilled across multiple locations despite a ban imposed by the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) in February 2025 to conserve groundwater.

Illegal borewell drilling has been reported in Prashant Layout (25–50 borewells), White Rose Layout, Pattandur Agrahara (25–100 borewells over the past 2–3 years), and SY 140 (around 20 borewells), according to Whitefield residents and confirmed by BWSSB.

CASES WERE REPORTED AT THREE MAIN LOCATIONS IN WHITEFIELD:

1. Samarpan Layout, ECC Road—Borewells have been drilled here since February. Despite eviction attempts, the contractors have resumed drilling at least 17 times. BWSSB even filed a police complaint, but only a non-cognizable report (NCR) was registered.
2. 6th Cross, Prithvi Layout, Athashri Road—A borewell was dug, with claims of permission from the Karnataka Groundwater Authority.
3. Upkar Layout (SY 142)—Drilling was ongoing as of 26 March in a sub-layout that lacks Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) approval.

Illegal borewell drilling are reported in Prashant Layout ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Residents speak out

Sandeep Anirudhan, from Citizens' Agenda for Bengaluru, criticised the authorities for their inaction. He told **Salar News**, "There is no deterrent. Contractors are not penalised, jailed, or fined heavily. Their equipment is not seized, and the borewells are not sealed. The main culprit behind most drilling violations is Sri Sai Borewell drilling. It all seems like a well-oiled operation."

Venkatesh, a resident from Glenmorgan, said: "I have reported many illegal borewells and emailed the BWSSB chairman, but no action was taken. The police even asked why it concerned me. Despite sharing videos and locations in the BBMP ward committee WhatsApp group, officials claim the area falls under '110 village'. The police only issue warnings, and drilling resumes once they leave."

Another Whitefield resident, who wished to remain anonymous, said: "In the past eight months, 13 borewells were dug on Borewell Road, Dodsworth Layout 5th Cross. Another seven were drilled near the 7th Cross and Borewell Main Road junction. Despite sharing video evidence, no action was taken. Now, construction has started without BBMP clearance, and thousands of litres of borewell water are used daily for curing."

Authorities pass the blame

When asked about the illegal drilling, Karnataka Groundwater Authority (KGWA) Deputy Director Jayanna denied issuing any permissions. He told **Salar News**, "We have not authorised anyone to carry out borewell drilling. The permissions contractors claim to have is from BWSSB."

However, BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar shifted responsibility back to KGWA. He told **Salar News**, "We can control drilling up to 25,000 litres. Beyond that, KGWA has to decide. The issue is also a non-cognizable offence, meaning we need to go to court for an FIR." —*Salar News*

BBMP to present budget estimates tomorrow

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Bengaluru's civic body, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), will present its budget estimates for the financial year 2025-26 on 28 March from 11.00am at Sir Puttanna Chetty Town Hall. The session will be chaired by BBMP Administrator SR Umashankar, with Chief Commissioner Tushar Giri Nath in attendance. Special Commissioner of Finance, Dr. K Harish Kumar, will present the budget, outlining key allocations and financial plans for the city's development. Several dignitaries and officials are expected to participate in the proceedings. The budget presentation will be streamed live on YouTube. —*Salar News*

Two senior cops held for taking bribe in City

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

An Assistant Commissioner of Police and an Assistant Sub-Inspector were arrested in Bengaluru on charges of accepting a bribe of Rs 2 lakh, Lokayukta police said on Wednesday.The two were arrested based on a complaint by a 42-year-old software engineer on Tuesday night, they said.ACP Tanveer SR and ASI Krishna Murthy, posted at Cyber, Economic and Narcotics Police Station in North East Division, had demanded Rs 4 lakh from the complainant to arrest accused persons in a cyber fraud case and conduct an investigation, Lokayukta police said.The complainant approached the Lokayukta police and a trap was laid. The ASI was caught while accepting Rs 2 lakh as advance, the Lokayukta police said. On his revelation, the ACP was also arrested.Meanwhile, the Lokayukta sleuths also arrested four other government officers in three separate cases in Ramanagara, Chitradurga and Belagavi districts, sources said —*PTI*

Hunsur MLA slams rudderless run of DCC Bank

MYSURU, 26 MARCH

Hundreds of farmers in Hunsur taluk protested outside the office of Mysuru-Chamarajanagar Districts Central Cooperative Bank (MCDCC Bank) on Ashoka Road at Lashkar Mohalla in Mysuru on Wednesday, raising slogans against its management for not distributing loans. The protesters were joined by JDS MLA from Hunsur GD Harish Gowda, who accused the bank officials of delaying the release of loan amounts even though the borrowers had repaid their earlier loans on time. The protesters threatened to intensify their agitation against the bank management if they failed to release the loan amounts within a week. Addressing the protesters, Gowda alleged that the bank management was holding back the loan amounts because most of the farmers are his supporters. He said only farmers who are close to Congress are given loans. Gowda also said the MCDCC Bank might have gone bankrupt as its officials were issuing the funds in the absence of an elected body. —*Salar News*

Heavy rain, wind claim 2 lives in Dharwad

DHARWAD, 26 MARCH

Heavy rain and strong gusts of winds that lashed Kittur region on Tuesday evening claimed two lives in Kalaghatagi taluk of Dharwad district. Police identified the deceased as Dawood, 52, and Rafiq, 50, both of them construction labourers from old Hubballi. The duo was engaged in the construction of a wall in Kadankop village of Kalaghatagi taluk when it collapsed on them due to heavy rain and wind, they said.Another labourer, identified as Mahantesh from Anchatageri, was injured and is undergoing treatment at a government hospital in Kalaghatagi. Kalaghatagi police have registered a case against the factory owners for negligence. —*Salar News*

SC junks plea for CBI probe into 'honey-trap' allegations

The issue created a stir in Assembly, prompting a probe

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed a plea for a CBI probe into an alleged "honey trap" attempt involving a minister and other politicians in State. A three-judge bench of Justices Vikram Nath, Sanjay Karol and Sandeep Mehta dismissed the PIL filed by social activist Binay Kumar Singh.

The plea had also sought the probe to be either monitored by the top court or by a committee headed by a retired Supreme Court judge.

Advocate Barun Kumar Sinha, appearing for the petitioner, said the allegation reported in the media required a thorough investigation against the persons behind it.

The plea said the "honey trap" of judges by certain vested interests was a serious threat to the independence of judiciary and the rule of the law."On 21 March, 2025 various media outlets carried the reports of troubling allegations made on the floor of Vidhan Soudha that a person aspiring to be the chief minister of the state has been successful in honey trapping several persons, amongst whom are judges," the plea, filed by advocate Abhishek, said.

The plea went on, "The allegations have been made by a sitting minister who has claimed himself to be a victim, thereby lending credibility to the serious allegations." Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna on 20 March informed the Assembly that there had been attempts to "honey-trap" him and that at least 48 politicians across parties fell victims to similar schemes. The issue created a stir in the assembly, prompting the home minister to announce a high-level probe whereas the opposition demanded a judicial inquiry by a sitting high court judge. Reacting to a PIL filed in Supreme Court on the issue, Rajanna said the PIL sought a CBI probe, claiming he had referred to "honey trapping" of judges, but he hadn't mentioned judges. —*PTI*

Govt to look into Rajanna's honey trap claim: Minister

GOKARNA, 26 MARCH

Home Minister G Parameshwara
PHOTO: PTI

- Rajanna on Tuesday had submitted a petition to Parameshwara, seeking a probe and necessary action on an alleged attempt to "honeytrap" him.

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said the government will examine Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna's petition on alleged attempts to "honey-trap" him, judiciously within the framework of law and take necessary action.

Rajanna on Tuesday had submitted a petition to Parameshwara, seeking a probe and necessary action on an alleged attempt to "honeytrap" him. "What he (Rajanna) has given me is a petition. A complaint cannot be given to me as I'm not a police station. We will examine the petition judiciously within the framework of law and take action."

The Home Minister on Tuesday said that the government will decide on the further course of action and the nature of the probe in connection with the case, after consulting with the legal team and after discussing with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. —*PTI*

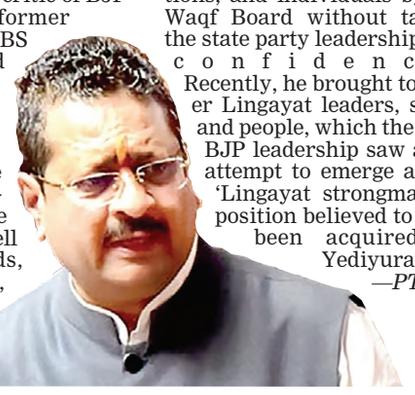
BLAMES VIJAYENDRA

Expelled Yatnal vows to fight dynasty politics

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

BJP MLA and strident Yeddyurappa critic Basanagouda Patil Yatnal on Wednesday said that BJP expelled him for "calling a spade, a spade". Yatnal said the decision to suspend him will not deter his fight against corruption, family politics, the development of North Karnataka and Hindutva. "Certain vested interests have played their part in furthering their agenda successfully," he said on X.

Yatnal is a bitter critic of BJP stalwart and former chief minister BS Yediyurappa and his son BY Vijayendra. "I will continue to serve my people with the same vigour & tenacity. I thank all the Karyakarthas, well wishers, friends, acquaintances, swamijis, media, my family, which has been a pillar of support & the almighty."



He also quoted a Kannada poem written by the 15-16th century poet Purandara Dasa, which says, "This is not the time for the truthful. This is the time for the wicked to prosper."

Yatnal also started mobilising supporters, including MLAs, former MPs, and a huge number of people, while taking out a march from Bidar to Chamarajanagar against the Waqf Act and notices issued to farmers, institutions, and individuals by the Waqf Board without taking the state party leadership into confidence. Recently, he brought together Lingayat leaders, seers, and people, which the state BJP leadership saw as an attempt to emerge as the 'Lingayat strongman', a position believed to have been acquired by Yediyurappa. —*PTI*

New unit at Govt Ayurveda College shows rich-poor divide

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

The Government Ayurveda Medical College (GAMC) has inaugurated a high-tech Panchakarma therapy unit and a new hostel building. The event was attended by Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao, among others, on 24 March.

The Rs 2.96 crore upgraded unit features 18 modern therapy rooms. Principal Prof Dr Surekha S Medikeri told Salar News, "The therapy rates are yet to be decided. Earlier, services were scattered across different rooms, which was inconvenient for VIP guests."

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao told **Salar News**, "The recently inaugurated Panchakarma unit in the Government Ayurveda College Hospital is not just for VIP patients. It is a chargeable unit, while the other Panchakarma section in the hospital remains free for everyone."

Meanwhile, concerns persist about inequality in rendering healthcare services in the government establishment. The older unit that rendered free services to patients remains outdated, while the new facility is accessible only to those who can pay for it.

However, Surekha said, "The only difference is that the old unit has services spread across multiple rooms, while the new one offers all treatments in one place. Providing high-end therapy at a low cost, or for free, will cause financial strain to the college. This unit is designed for affluent individuals, VIPs, and anyone who can afford the treatment."

Panchakarma is an Ayurvedic treatment that cleanses and rejuvenates the body, mind and consciousness. Each Panchakarma treatment is personalised based on an individual's condition and requires careful supervision. —*Salar News*

PROTEST FOR JOBS

Karmika Samrakshane organisation protests at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Wednesday, demanding that the government make the jobs of BBMP cleaning and waste collection drivers permanent PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

JHARKIHOLI GETS HONORARY DOCTORATE

MYSURU, 26 MARCH

PWD minister Satish Jarakiholi is among three persons who will be conferred with an honorary doctorate by the Karnataka State Open University (KSOU) during its 20th convocation on Thursday at its Mysuru campus.

Vice Chancellor Prof Sharanappa V Halase said the other two persons who will receive the honorary doctorates are Chitradurga Ideal Education Society Chairman Irfanulla Sharief and Kalaburgi-based Sharanabasaveshwara Vidyavardhaka Sangha Chairperson Dakshayini Appa. On the convocation day, the university will also award degrees to 17348 candidates, including 10,929 girls. Atul Kumar Tiwari, the secretary of the Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, will deliver the convocation address. Governor Thawarchand Gehlot and Higher Education Minister Dr MC Sudhakar will be the chief guests. —*Salar News*

Sewage water as well as banned chemicals for colours were used in in the products PHOTO: SALAR

BELAGAVI FACTORY MAKES ICE CREAM USING DRAIN WATER, SHUT

BELAGAVI, 26 MARCH

The health authorities in Belagavi district have shut down an ice-cream factory in Chikkodi division on Wednesday for allegedly using hazardous and banned chemicals and sewage water in the manufacturing process.

Requesting anonymity, sources in the health department in Chikkodi division said that based on video evidence, officials conducted a raid at the factory owned by Srikant Bajantri in Masanagi village of Athani taluk.

Bajantri has reportedly confessed to the health department officials that his staff used sewage water as well as banned chemicals for colours and chocolate flavours in the products.

"We have been using these substances to manufacture our ice creams for the past five years," Bajantri said, adding that no adverse effect was reported so far. The health department is yet to frame charges against Bajantri. —*Salar News*

MAN RAPES MINOR NIECE IN NANJANGUD

MYSURU, 26 MARCH

Nanjangud Town police on Wednesday arrested a man and booked him under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act for allegedly raping and impregnating his niece, a minor girl studying in Class 10.

The crime came to light when her parents took the girl to a hospital for a medical check-up on Wednesday.

The girl revealed that she was allegedly raped by her uncle multiple times during the past few months, threatening to kill her if she revealed the sexual assault to her parents.

Officials of the Women and Child Welfare Department have taken the girl into their custody —*Salar News*

Chhattisgarh CM woos investors from Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

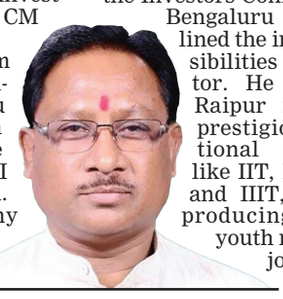
- Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Wednesday assured the investors in Bengaluru that he would be available round-the-clock to listen to their concerns and provide assistance.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Wednesday assured the investors in Bengaluru that he would be available round-the-clock to listen to their concerns and provide assistance.

Making a pitch for investment during the Chhattisgarh Investor Connect organised here, Sai apprised the business community in Bengaluru of the availability of minerals and natural resources in his state. He also highlighted its investor-friendly industrial policy, which is designed to ensure ease of doing business.

"I invite you to invest in the growth engine of the country. Our team is working tirelessly to make the state an investment destination," the CM said.

"There is a team always ready to welcome you and help you set up your venture in the state. Being the Chief Minister of state I will be there with you. Whenever you feel my help, I am ready to listen to you round-the-clock," he said.



The Chhattisgarh government also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with NASSCOM to boost the state's development and generate employment opportunities.

Sai also met NASSCOM Vice President Srikant Srinivasan and other representatives at the Investors Connect Meet in Bengaluru and underlined the immense possibilities in skill sector. He noted that Raipur is home to prestigious educational institutions like IIT, NIT, AIIMS, and IIIT, which are producing skilled youth ready for the job market. —*PTI*

28 TO 30 MARCH

2,000 KSRTC buses to run for Ugadi, Eid

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

The Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) on Wednesday said it will operate 2,000 additional buses during the Ugadi and Eid al-Fitr festivals.

In view of the Ugadi and Ramzan (Eid ul-Fitr) festivals on 30 and 31 March, respectively, the KSRTC has made arrangements to operate 2,000 extra buses from Bengaluru to various places, in addition to the existing schedules, from 28 to 30 March, the corporation said in a statement. Retrun services will be operated from various places to Bengaluru on 31 March, it said.

The special buses will be operated from Bengaluru's Kempegowda Bus Station to places including Dharmasthala, Kukkesubramanya, Shivamogga, Hassan, Mangaluru, Kundapura, Sringeri, Horanadu, Davangere, Hubbali, Dharwad, Belagavi, Vijayapura, Gokarna, Sirsi, Karwar, Raichur, Kalaburagi, Ballari, Koppala, Yadgir, Bidar, Tirupathi, Vijayawada and Hyderabad, the KSRTC said.

Special buses from Mysuru Road Bus Station (in Bengaluru) will be operated to Mysuru, Hunsur, Piriyapatna, Virajpet, Kushalanagar and Madikeri.

Special buses will also be operated from Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) Bus Station at Shanthinagar to Madurai, Kumbakonam, Chennai, Coimbatore, Tiruchi, Palakkad, Thrissur, Ernakulam, Khozikode and a few other places in the two neighbouring states.

Facilities are provided to book computerised reservation tickets in advance for the special buses, it added. —*PTI*

City cab driver kills wife, surrenders before cops

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

A 39-year-old cab driver allegedly strangled his wife to death and later surrendered at the police station, confessing to his crime, police said on Wednesday.

Chandrashekhar was placed under arrest after police visited the crime scene, they said.

The police said the accused was suspicious of his wife's marital fidelity and that prima facie that was the motive behind the murder. They said he used to pick up quarrels with the victim as she was often seen talking to someone on phone. On Tuesday, too, an argument broke out between Chandrashekhar and his 35-year-old wife and in a fit of rage, he strangled her to death.

He then went to Sampigehalli police station and confessed his crime, they said.

The couple have been married for about 12 years and have two sons, ten and zix years old, police said, adding that the children were at school at the time of the incident.

"We have registered a case of murder and arrested the accused in connection with the incident," the officer said. —*PTI*

HC issue notices to Verma and Atishi over Delhi win

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Delhi High Court on Wednesday issued separate notices to PWD minister Parvesh Verma and AAP leader and former chief minister Atishi on pleas challenging their election win in their respective constituency. The first plea claimed that Verma, despite being present in the returning officer's office before 3pm on 17 January was not allowed to submit his nomination form, necessary to participate in the elections. Verma, won the election with 30,088 votes defeating former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal by 4,089 votes. The plea against Atishi alleged that a day before the polling was to be held, her associates allegedly bribed voters. —*PTI*

SP MP Ramji Lal Suman's house attacked in Agra

AGRA, 26 MARCH

Samajwadi Party's Rajya Sabha MP Ramji Lal Suman house was attacked in Agra. Dozens of Karni Sena workers allegedly vandalised the house, damaging several cars, breaking chairs, and shattering glass windows. According to Suman's son, Ranjit Suman, the family had been receiving threats and abusive language on social media for several days. Despite being aware of the situation, the police administration took no action, and the attackers were allegedly patronized. The attack is believed to be a response to a video of the MP, in which he referred to Rana Sanga, a 16th-century Rajput king, as a "traitor" for inviting Babur to defeat Ibrahim Lodi. Rana Sanga is celebrated for his leadership in uniting the Rajput kingdoms and resisting Mughal invasions. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Delhi CMs convoy halted for 15 mins by stray cows

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta's convoy was brought to a sudden halt on the Haiderpur flyover after a group of stray cattle wandered onto the road. The unexpected interruption occurred when the Chief Minister was en route to a meeting, causing a 15-minute delay. According to eyewitnesses, the cattle appeared on the flyover, forcing the convoy's driver to slam on the brakes. The Chief Minister's security team quickly sprang into action, ensuring the safety of Kejriwal and other occupants of the vehicle. The incident highlighted the ongoing issue of stray cattle on Delhi's roads, which poses a significant risk to motorists and pedestrians alike. Following the incident, the Delhi government has been urged to take measures to address the problem, including providing adequate shelter and care for the stray animals. —*PTI*

2 more Cong MLAs suspended from Odisha Assembly

BHUBANESWAR, 26 MARCH

Odisha Assembly Speaker Surama Padhy has suspended two more Congress MLAs, Taraprasad Bahinipati and Ramesh Jena, for seven days due to "indiscipline" in the House. This brings the total number of suspended Congress MLAs to 14. The suspension follows a protest by the two MLAs, who played gongs in the Well of the House during Question Hour. They were demanding the formation of a House Committee to investigate crimes against women in the state. The Congress party has been staging demonstrations in the assembly since 7 March, seeking the formation of the committee. The principal opposition party, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), also staged a walkout during Question Hour, demanding reservations for ST, SC, and OBC candidates in education and jobs. —*PTI*

Not being allowed to speak as LoP: Rahul

Speaker says LoP should conduct himself as per rules, amidst doubt over silencing

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday claimed that he was not given a chance to speak in the House which was being run in an "undemocratic style" and said Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla had made "unsubstantiated" remarks about him.

Gandhi's remarks came after Birla asked him to follow the rules of procedure that members are expected to observe to uphold the dignity of the House. It is unclear why the Speaker made the remarks.

The former Congress president said Birla made some remarks about him and then abruptly adjourned the House.

"The Speaker just got up and left. He did not allow me to speak a word. He was speaking about me, and I don't know what he said about me, all unsubstantiated. I said, 'let me speak as you have spoken about me', but he did not say a word and just left. He adjourned the House when there was no need of it," Gandhi said.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

Speaking with reporters in Parliament House complex, Gandhi said there is a convention that the Leader of Opposition is allowed to speak.

"So, in what manner is this House being run? We are not being allowed to speak. I have not done anything, I was sitting quietly, I did not speak anything. In the last 7-8 days, I have not been allowed to speak," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said. "The House is being run in an undemocratic style," Gandhi claimed.

Earlier, in his remarks, Birla said members are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that upholds the high standards and dignity of the House.

"Several instances have come to my notice where the conduct of members does not conform to the high standards," Birla said.

"It is expected of the Leader of the Opposition to conduct himself as per the rules," he added.

About 70 Congress Lok Sabha MPs met Birla to raise the issue later. —*PTI*

Withholding funds to states over NEP unjus: Parl panel

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Withholding funds to states which have not agreed to implement the PM SHRI schools scheme is unjustified, a parliamentary panel said.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports, headed by Congress' Digivjay Singh, recommended that the Ministry of Education should re-evaluate Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) funding allocations and ensure that none of the states are disadvantaged for not accepting NEP 2020 or PM SHRI scheme.

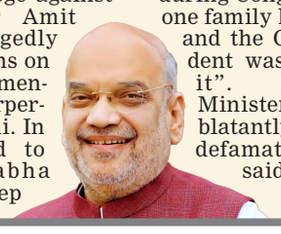
"The Committee has taken serious note of the non-release of SSA funds to certain states which have not signed MoUs for implementation of PM SHRI scheme. The total funds pending under this scheme to the states are considerable, with over Rs 1,000 crore to West Bengal, Rs 859.63 crore to Kerala and Rs 2,152 crore to Tamil Nadu," the report tabled in the Rajya Sabha said. "The Committee takes the view that this (withholding funds) is not factual or justified. The SSA predates PM SHRI and is intended to help states to achieve the targets of the Right to Education Act."

The panel recommended the release of pending funds to prevent disruption in salaries, teachers training, and school maintenance. —*PTI*

Shah gets privilege notice for jab at Sonia

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

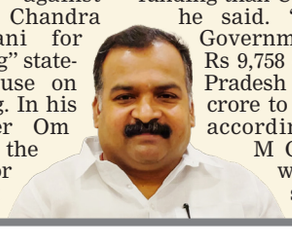
Congress chief whip in Rajya Sabha Jairam Ramesh gave a notice for breach of privilege against Home Minister Amit Shah for allegedly casting aspersions on Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi. In his notice filed to Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar, Ramesh said on 25 March, Shah, while replying to the debate on the Disaster Management Bill, 2024, had claimed that "during Congress rule, only one family had the control and the Congress president was a member of it". The Home Minister's statement is blatantly false and is defamatory, Ramesh said. —*PTI*



MoS faces privilege notice for MGNREGS claim

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

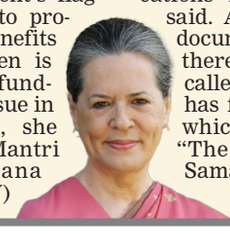
Congress whip in Lok Sabha Manickam Tagore gave a notice to move a breach of privilege motion against Union Minister Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani for making "misleading" statements in the House on MGNREGS funding. In his notice to Speaker Om Birla, Tagore said the Minister of State for Rural Development made a "factually incorrect" statement during the Question Hour on Tuesday. "Pemmasani claimed that Tamil Nadu receives more funding than Uttar Pradesh," he said. "The Central Government released Rs 9,758 crore to Uttar Pradesh and Rs 7,414 crore to Tamil Nadu," according to the MGNREGA website, he said. —*PTI*



Maternity scheme underfunded says Sonia

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday said the government's flagship programme to provide maternity benefits to pregnant women is "severely underfunded". Raising the issue in the Rajya Sabha, she said Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) "requires an annual budget of around Rs 12,000 crore. Surprisingly, the Budget documents do not contain separate information on allocations for PMMVY," she said. All that the Budget documents reveal is that there is a programme called Samarthya which has five components, of which PMMVY is one. "The allocation for Samarthya is only Rs 2,521 crore. —*PTI*



Kamra gets breach of privilege notice from M'rashtra Assembly

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

A breach of privilege notice was moved against stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra in the Maharashtra legislative council on Wednesday over his parody song targeting deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

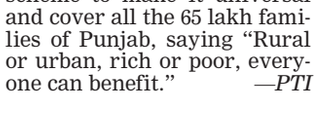
BJP legislator Pravin Darekar moved the notice against the comedian as well as Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sushma Andhare.

"Kunal Kamra performed a song containing personal and insulting references to deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde," said Darekar, leader of the legislative council, presenting the motion. "Andhare supported the performance and used objectionable language, which amounts to contempt of the House."

Both Kamra and Andhare disrespected the dignity of legislative institutions through their remarks, Darekar claimed.

The notice will have to be approved by Council chairman Ram Shinde before it is presented to the privilege committee. If the committee approves it, the motion will be discussed in the House.

In the state assembly, Shiv Sena MLA Ramesh Bornare submitted a breach of privilege notice against Andhare for allegedly mocking Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. —*PTI*



Kunal Kamra PHOTO: ANI

Sena (UBT) cites PM on criticism

Pune, 26 March

Citing Prime Minister Modi's comment that "criticism is the soul of democracy", the Shiv Sena (UBT) mouthpiece 'Saamana' questioned the "extreme response". Kamra's parody song had was merely old wine in a new bottle, it said, in a reference to the Shinde, Uddhav Thakeray split. —*PTI*

CBI raids Baghel's house in ₹6,000 cr Mahadev betting scam

RAIPUR/NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

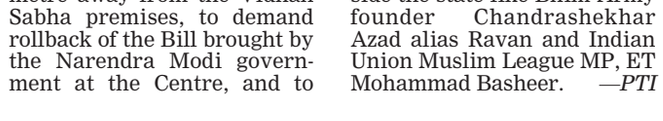
The CBI on Wednesday conducted searches at 60 locations, including the residence of former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, in connection with the alleged Rs 6,000 crore Mahadev betting app scam, even as the Congress called it political vendetta and harassment of its leaders. The agency teams swooped down at Baghel's residences in Raipur and Bhilai, as well as the houses of Congress MLA Devendra Yadav and some IPS officers, officials said.

Meanwhile, the Congress leader's office said on X, "Now CBI has arrived. Former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel is scheduled to go to Delhi today for the meeting of the 'Drafting Committee' constituted for the AICC meeting to be held in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) on 8 and 9 April. Before that, the CBI has reached Raipur and Bhilai Niwas."

The Congress said the CBI's searches at Baghel's residences were politically motivated, and asserted it will not be intimidated by such actions.

CBI Spokesperson said in a statement "Investigations have revealed that the promoters allegedly paid substantial amounts as 'protection money' to public servants to ensure the smooth and uninterrupted functioning of their illegal betting network"

"In the course of searches, incriminating digital and documentary evidence were found and seized," it added. —*PTI*



Security personnel guards as CBI conducts searches at the residence of Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel, in Raipur PHOTO:PTI

Punjab Budget gives free health insurance to all

CHANDIGARH, 26 MARCH

Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema on Wednesday presented a Rs 2.36 lakh crore budget, which focusses on tackling drug menace in the state, and allocated a whopping Rs 5,598 crore for the health sector.

No fresh taxes were imposed in the budget for financial year 2025-26. It was silent on giving monthly Rs 1,000 to women which was one of the poll promises of the AAP before coming to power.

He said the biggest threat to the progress and prosperity of Punjab is the drug problem and that will carry out the first-ever 'drug census' in the next year. This data will be used to craft a strategy to eradicate the drug menace.

Cheema announced to extend the state health insurance scheme to make it universal and cover all the 65 lakh families of Punjab, saying "Rural or urban, rich or poor, everyone can benefit." —*PTI*

AIMPLB protests Waqf Bill in Bihar

All India Muslim Personal Law Board's (AIMPLB) General Secretary Maulana Mohammed Fazlur Rahim Mujaddidi addresses the gathering during a 'dharna' by the AIMPLB members over the Waqf Amendment Bill 2024, in Patna, Bihar PHOTO: PTI

PATNA, 26 MARCH

Protests against the Waqf Bill rocked Bihar on Wednesday, from the legislature to the streets, as political parties within the state and outside stood in solidarity with the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), which organised a 'maha dharna'.

The AIMPLB demonstrations were held barely a kilometre away from the Vidhan Sabha premises, to demand rollback of the Bill brought by the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, and to request Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to reconsider support to the contentious legislation.

Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Yadav turned up shortly after ruckus created by his colleagues in the RJD and allies like the CPI(ML) forced adjournment of the assembly within minutes of commencement of proceedings. The 'maha dharna' was also attended leaders from outside the state like Bhim Army founder Chandrashekhar Azad alias Ravan and Indian Union Muslim League MP, ET Mohammad Basheer. —*PTI*

AFTER TWO YEAR DELAY

GE delivers first engines of Tejas Mk 1A to HAL

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

GE Aerospace has delivered the first of 99 F404-IN20 engines to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft Mk 1A fight jet, the company said on Wednesday.

"On Tuesday we were excited to deliver the first of 99 F404-IN20 engines to our valued customer Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft Mk 1A fight jet," the company said.

According to the company's website, the F404-IN20 engine is a tailored design for India's single-engine fighter with the highest thrust within the F404 family and a higher-flow fan, unique single-crystal turbine blades and numerous special components.

The F404 engine is one of the most successful in military aviation history and powers thousands of combat aircraft worldwide, as per GE Aerospace.

The American aircraft engine supplier added that GE Aerospace, by 2016, had fulfilled its commitment to HAL and delivered 65 F404-IN20 engines for the Tejas LCA. With no additional engine orders on the horizon, the production line for F404-IN20 was shut down.

However, when HAL ordered an additional 99 engines in 2021 our team began the complex task of restarting the F404-IN20 production line, which had been dormant for five years, and re-engaging, the company added. —*ANI*

The F404 engine is one of the most successful in military aviation history PHOTO: PTI

Set up feeding rooms in public areas: Centre to states

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Indian government has instructed states, union territories, and central ministries to establish feeding and changing rooms for women and children in public places. This initiative aims to improve accessibility and convenience for mothers, particularly those in employment.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has written to various ministries, including Road Transport and Highways, Civil Aviation, and the Railway Board, to ensure these facilities are made available.

To date, 312 feeding and changing rooms have been set up at airports, with 164 under the Airports Authority of India and 148 at non-AAI airports. Additionally, feeding rooms have been installed at bus stations in Telangana, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

The women and child development ministry has also issued an advisory to create gender-friendly spaces in public offices and workplaces. This includes installing sanitary product vending machines and incinerators, allocating space for feeding rooms and restrooms, and setting up crèche facilities in public buildings with 50 or more employees.

Minister of State for Women and Child Development Savitri Thakur confirmed these details in the Rajya Sabha, highlighting the government's commitment to supporting working mothers and promoting inclusive public spaces. —*PTI*

CPI(M) will enter 21st century in the 22nd: Tharoor

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor launched a scathing attack on Kerala's Left Democratic Front (LDF) government, suggesting that they are out of touch with modern times. Tharoor's remarks came after the Kerala Assembly passed a bill allowing private universities to open in the state, a move that marks a significant shift in the CPI(M)-led government's stance.

Tharoor criticised the government's "19th-century ideology" and highlighted their initial resistance to technological advancements, such as computers and mobile phones. He recalled how communist parties smashed computers in public sector offices when they were first introduced in India and were the only parties to object to the introduction of mobile phones.

"I'm sure they will one day finally enter the 21st century, but it may only be in the 22nd!" Tharoor quipped. —*PTI*

32,000 evacuated from Balasore for missile test

BALASORE, 26 MARCH

Approximately 32,000 residents of six hamlets in Odisha's Balasore district have been relocated to safe shelters ahead of a planned missile test at the Integrated Test Range (ITR) in Chandipur. The evacuation, carried out as a precautionary measure, affects those living within a 2.5km radius of the launch pad. The district administration has made elaborate arrangements for the residents' comfort and safety during their temporary stay at three nearby shelter centers. The relocation is a precautionary measure to ensure the residents' safety during the missile test. The authorities ensured all necessary arrangements for the residents' stay at the shelter centers. The evacuation was carried out smoothly. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FB

Delhi HC bins PIL against Honey Singh's song

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday permitted the withdrawal of a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) about the lyrics of the song 'Maniac', produced by YoYo Honey Singh Productions Private Limited. A bench comprising Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyay and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela declined to entertain the plea and advised the petitioner to explore other remedies, stating that if the matter involved vulgarity or obscenity, an FIR should be filed. The court also took exception to the language used by the petitioner's counsel, particularly the term "Bhojpuri vulgarity." The judges emphasised that vulgarity transcends regional boundaries and asserted that it should not be regionalised. —*PTI*

New parasitic species discovered in Bay of Bengal

KOLKATTA, 26 MARCH

A novel species of parasitic isopod, active in the buccal cavity of marine fishes, has been identified in the Bay of Bengal by researchers from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI). The species, designated 'Lobothorax Bharat', was discovered through collaborative research between the Estuarine Biology Regional Centre, ZSI, and Berhampur University. This breakthrough contributes significantly to existing knowledge of marine biodiversity and fish parasitology. The research team, led by Jaya Kishore Seth, Anil Mohapatra, and Basudev Tripathy, identified the species as a member of the genus Lobothorax, known to parasitise marine fish. These parasites feed on the blood and mucus of their hosts, often causing anaemia in affected fish populations. —*PTI*

Heat wave forecast for 108 areas in Andhra Pradesh

AMARAVATI, 26 MARCH

The Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) has forecast heat waves for 108 mandals on Wednesday. "15 mandals in Srikakulam district, 21 in Vizianagaram district, 10 in Parvathipuram Manyam district and eight in Alluri Sitaramaraju district are likely to experience heatwave conditions," said APSDMA Managing Director R Kurmanadh. Seven mandals in Anakapalle and Kakinada districts, three in Konaseema and Guntur districts, 13 in East Godavari district, five in Eluru district, two in Krishna district, six in NTR district and eight in Palnadu district are also expected to be affected by the heat waves. On Tuesday, maximum temperatures were recorded at 41.6°C at Rudravaram in Nandyal district, 41.1°C in Darimadugu in Prakasam district and 40.9°C in Somasila in Nellore district. —*PTI*

Scribe held for questioning bank linked to Assam CM

Police accuse Mozumder of caste slur, criminal intimidation

GUWAHATI, 26 MARCH

A journalist of a digital news portal in Assam was arrested after he questioned the MD of a cooperative bank over alleged financial irregularities during a protest, officials said. He was detained for over nine hours by the police before being officially arrested.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is a director of the Assam Cooperative Apex Bank and Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Biswajit Phukan is its chairman according to 'The Wire'.

Journalist Dilwar Hussain Mozumder was arrested after he questioned Managing Director Dambaru Saikia of the Assam Cooperative Apex Bank Limited about the alleged financial mismanagement. "Strangely, as he was leaving the bank Mozumder, the Panbazar police asked him to report at the station at once," The CrossCurrent ditor Arup Kalita told 'The Wire' on Tuesday. "Upon reaching there, he was detained."

Mozumder PHOTO: FB

- The complaint said Mozumder, chief reporter of 'The Cross Current' and the assistant general secretary of the Gauhati Press Club, made remarks which were made to intentionally insult, humiliate and offend the complainant, who is a Scheduled Tribe

Mozumder, chief reporter of 'The Cross Current' and also the assistant general secretary of the Gauhati Press Club, was arrested under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including those pertaining to criminal intimidation or the act of threatening someone to harm them, and relevant sections of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, officials said.

The complaint said the journalist made remarks which were made to intentionally insult, humiliate and offend the complainant, who is a Scheduled Tribe (ST).

Mozumder's wife and lawyer were reportedly allowed to enter the police station late on Tuesday, after repeated pleas that Mozumder needs medication.

The Assam Jatiya Parishad's youth wing Jatiya Yuva Shakti (JYS) had protested against the alleged financial irregularities and condemned the arrest. —*Agencies*

JUDGE'S CASH STASH

SC blocks bid to rush FIR against HC judge Varma

NEW DELHI, 26 MAR

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused an urgent mentioning of a plea seeking a direction to Delhi Police to lodge an FIR over the alleged discovery of semi-burnt stash of cash from the official residence of Delhi High Court judge Yashwant Varma.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna was urged by lawyer Mathews J Nedumpara that the plea be listed for urgent hearing before a bench as it pertained to larger public interest. The lawyer said that the apex court has done a "commendable job" but an FIR was needed. "Don't make public statements," the CJI responded.

A co-petitioner said that had such a case been filed against a common man, several probe agencies, such as the CBI and ED, would have gone after that person.

"This is quite enough. The plea will come up accordingly," the CJI asserted.

Yashwant Varma PHOTO: ANI

A plea was filed by Nedumpara and three others on Sunday seeking a direction to police to lodge an FIR in the matter.

The plea also challenges the 1991 judgement in the K Veeraswami case, in which the top court ruled that no criminal proceedings could be initiated against a judge of the high court or the top court without the prior nod of the Chief Justice of India.

Meanwhile, a team of police led by Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) visited Justice Varma's residence to investigate the premise and question the staff. —*PTI*

SC stalls arrest of two Uttar Pradesh journalists

A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and Rajesh Bindal extended its earlier order by four more weeks, asking the police not to take any coercive steps against journalists Abhishek Updhyay and Mamta Tripathi for writing an article and making some posts on X. Upadhyay had published an Article on "caste dynamics of the general administration" and identified a caste who held certain positions in the state . —PTI

Two Allahabad HC judges get SC collegium nod

The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna approved the proposal to appoint two advocates as judges of the Allahabad High Court. The lawyers are Amitabh Kumar Rai and Rajiv Lochan Shukla. The decision was taken in a meeting held on 25 March by the collegium, which comprises Chief Justice Khanna aside from Justices BR Gavai, Surya Kant, Abhay S Oka and Vikram Nath. —PTI

SC asks states, UTs to set up mechanism over misleading ads

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the states and union territories to create a grievance redressal mechanism against misleading advertisements that "can cause great harm to society". A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said state governments should create such mechanisms for members of the public to lodge complaints about objectionable advertisements prohibited under Drugs and Magic Remedies Act, 1954. —*Agencies*

Yoga teacher 'buried alive' for suspected affair

ROHTAK, 26 MARCH

Three months after a 45-year-old yoga teacher went missing, his body was found in a pit in Charkhi Dadri in Haryana after a probe revealed that he was "buried alive" over a suspected illicit relationship with the wife of one of the four accused, police said on Wednesday.

Police said the main accused, Rajkaran, suspected Jagdeep of having an illicit relationship with his wife.

"Rajkaran is absconding. Two of the main accused's accomplices have been arrested," SHO Shivaji Colony, Rohtak, Inspector Dilbag Singh said.

During their questioning, the accused told the police that they kidnapped Jagdeep, taped his mouth, tied his hands and legs and took him to Charkhi Dadri where the pit had been dug in a deserted field.

The suspects told the police that he was "buried alive" in the pit.

The murder has come to light amid outrage over the gruesome killing of a former Merchant Navy officer Saurabh Rajput allegedly by his wife and her lover in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut. Rajput was drugged and then stabbed to death and his body dismembered and sealed inside a drum with cement. —*PTI*

Hazaribag erupts in clashes over Ram Navami procession

HAZARIBAG, 26 MARCH

Stones were allegedly pelted during a religious procession in Jharkhand's Hazaribag, triggering clashes, police said on Wednesday. An FIR has been lodged against 10 named and 200 unidentified persons.

The incident occurred near Jama Masjid Chowk around 11pm on Tuesday when a Mangla procession was underway as part of the Ram Navami celebration. The incident happened when the group leading the procession played some songs, which were objected to by another group.

The issue led to a heated altercation, which soon escalated into a scuffle and stone pelting at Jhanda Chowk.

Police resorted to aerial firing and tear gas to control the crowd.

The situation, however, did not escalate further as the forces deployed at the scene quickly took control, ensuring peace was restored.

As per tradition, the Mangla Julus procession is carried out every Tuesday after Holi leading up to Ram Navami. This year, Ram Navami falls on 6 April. On Tuesday, various Akharas took part in the Mangla Julus procession. A heavy police contingent has been deployed at the spot to maintain law and order. —*PTI*

Police try to control the situation after two community groups clashed during a procession ahead of the Ram Navami festival, in Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand PHOTO: PTI

MAN RECITES CHALISA OUTSIDE MOSQUE IN UP, ARRESTED FOR DISTURBING PEACE

MEERUT, 26 MARCH

Police have booked a Hindu outfit leader here for reciting Hanuman Chalisa near a mosque inside the Cantonment area and disrupting communal harmony, police said on Wednesday.

"Sachin Sirohi, President of the All Bhartiya Hindu Suraksha Sansthan, was booked along with some unidentified men," Circle Officer Santosh Kumar Singh said.

According to the police report, Sirohi and his associates on Monday created a ruckus outside the mosque, claiming it to be illegal. They then recited Hanuman Chalisa near the mosque and allegedly threatened to demolish it, it stated. As the news of the incident spread through the city, it caused panic among locals. —*PTI*

M'rashtra criminal opens fire at TN cops; shot dead

CHENNAI, 26 MARCH

- Jaffer was taken by police to Taramani Railway Station area when he took the pistol from inside the motorcycle and opened fire on the police team

Jaffer Gulam Hussein Irani, belonging to the notorious Irani gang of robbers based in Maharashtra, opened fire on a police team at the Tamil Nadu capital on Wednesday.

He was injured when the police returned fire and was later declared brought dead by hospital authorities, police said.

ADGP-Greater Chennai Police Commissioner A Arun said Jaffer had hidden a pistol inside the motorcycle he used for chain snatching incidents. "He tried to escape by attacking the police; the pistol was hidden inside the bike," he said.

The motorcycle was abandoned here before Jaffer and two others tried to fly out of Chennai after committing the crimes.

Meanwhile, a Chennai city police statement said that at about 2.30am, Jaffer, as part of probe to recover robbed jewellery and the vehicle used to perpetrate the crimes, was taken by police to Taramani Railway Station area. Suddenly, the accused took the pistol from inside the motorcycle and opened fire on the police team. —*PTI*

3 minors held for stabbing 16-yr-old to death

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

A 16-year-old boy was abducted and killed for a Rs 10 lakh ransom in the Wazirabad area of north Delhi, a police officer said on Wednesday. Three minors have been apprehended in connection with the murder, he said. The class 9 student was taken to a deserted area near Bhalaswa Lake, where he was stabbed multiple times.

"The family of the boy had received a call regarding a ransom of Rs 10 lakh. Later, they discovered his body," said the officer. "It was found that the kidnapped boy was last seen with three accused, two of them aged 16 and 17, on a motorcycle on Jharoda Pushta road," the officer said.

Police apprehended all three boys, who, during the interrogation said they took the victim to a forested area near Bhalaswa Lake, where they stabbed him and fled, leaving him dead. The next day, they called the boy's father, a driver by profession, using the boy's SIM and demanded a ransom of Rs 10 lakh.

Family members mourn after a Class 9 student was kidnapped and murdered by friends for Rs 10 lakh ransom in New Delhi on Tuesday night PHOTO: PTI

- The class 9 student was taken to a deserted area near Bhalaswa Lake, where he was stabbed multiple times

Police sources said that the accused also tried to cut the boy's body into parts.

The mother of the boy said that the accused were acquaintances who lived nearby.

"My son left on Sunday around 7.30pm after receiving a call, saying he will come back in 10 minutes. Later, we got a call with a demand for Rs 10 lakh," she said.

The father demanded retribution justice, "He was killed so brutally. His throat was slit and he was stabbed multiple times. I want them to go through the same pain that my son did," he said. —*PTI*

'BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL'

Kerala Chief Secy calls out colour & sex bias

T'PURAM, 26 MARCH

Kerala Chief Secretary Sarada Muraleedharan has spoken out about the colour and gender bias she has faced and its continued presence in society, sparking a debate on social media with many people showing their support.

What prompted the Chief Secretary to ignite the social debate was a comment made by someone comparing her work with that of her husband and predecessor V Venu saying "it is as black as my husband's was white".

Hurt by the comment, Muraleedharan had put up a Facebook post about it but later deleted it because she was "flustered by the flurry of responses".

"I am reposting it because certain well-wishers said that there were things that needed to be discussed. I agree. So here goes, once again," she said in her post, which garnered over 1,000 reactions and has been commented upon and shared hundreds of times.

Sarada Muraleedharan PHOTO: X

In the FB post on Tuesday night, Muraleedharan also shared how she grew up feeling like she was worth less because of her dark skin. It was only later, with her children's help, that she realised black is "beautiful."

Speaking to a TV channel on Wednesday, she said that society needs to change its attitudes and overcome these biases. According to her, this change must begin at home and in schools.

She further said the comparison with her husband was "unexpected" and it was Venu who encouraged to put up her FB post against it again. "He is the one who gave me the courage to do so," she said.

She added that, being in government, she was in a better position to bring attention to the issue, which was another reason for speaking out.

She also felt that the comparison not only referred to her dark complexion but carried a "value connotation" about the current governance being "black".

"Therefore, I thought that we need to 'call it out'," she told the channel.

While she refused to tell the channel who made the comparative comment, she said the individual has not responded subsequently.

She said that she was getting a lot of responses regarding her post, some asking why she was reacting, while some others sharing their similar experiences.

"Those who have not faced such a bias, think it is a small issue. But, it is a big deal for those who have faced it. It is something which has questioned their identity and worthiness," Muraleedharan said. —*PTI*

Man who opened fire at SAD leader granted bail

AMRITSAR, 26 MARCH

A court here has granted bail to Narain Singh Chaura, who opened fire at Shiromani Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Singh Badal at the gate of the Golden Temple in Amritsar on 4 December last year.

Badal survived the attempt on his life and Chaura was overpowered by policemen.

The 68-year-old was arrested immediately after the incident and was subsequently booked under relevant provisions of the law, including attempt to murder and under the provisions of the Arms Act.

His lawyer Jaspal Singh Manjpur said that Chaura was granted bail by the Additional Sessions judge of Amritsar, Sumit Ghai, on Tuesday.

Ghai said, "As the applicant has been in custody since 4.12.2024 and the conclusion of trial will take its own time, no useful purpose would be served by detaining the accused/applicant in custody for an indefinite period."

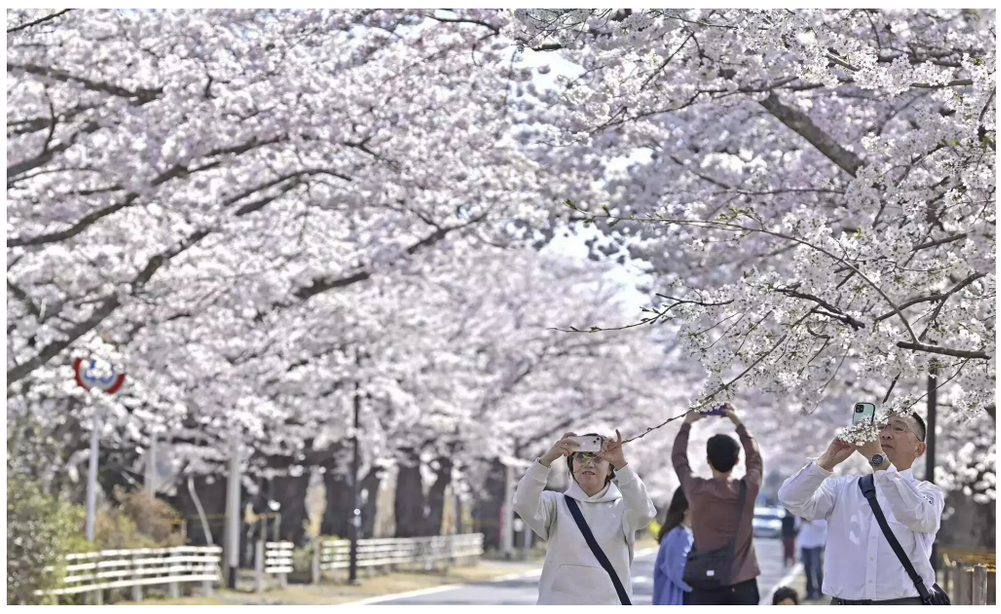
"Accordingly, bail application is allowed and the accused/applicant is admitted to bail on his furnishing bail bond in the sum of Rs 1 lakh with one surety in the like amount..." he said.

Chaura is expected to be released from Ropar jail on Wednesday. —*PTI*

Narain Singh Chaura PHOTO: X

SAKURA MARKS SPRING'S ARRIVAL

Cherry blossom trees saw it's first blooms on 24 March in Tokyo. These pink flower bearing trees known as "Sakura" in Japanese symbolise life and death. These trees blossom between March to April and the season drives of tourism in Japan with an estimate of 63 million tourists. This boosts the economy, with estimates suggesting a total revenue of around ¥1.14 trillion (Rs 9.7 lakh crore)
PHOTO: PTI



Gaza child amputees struggle amid aid cutoff

Five-year-old Sila Abu Aqlan curled her lip in concentration as she practised walking for the first time on a prosthetic leg at a clinic in Gaza City. The foot of the new leg had a little pink sneaker with a lacy frill, matching her pink hoodie.

It has been nearly 15 months since the little girl's leg was amputated after it was left severely burned from an Israeli airstrike. Finally, she is being fit for a prosthetic. One of the most shocking sights in Gaza's war has been the thousands of children with amputated limbs from Israel's bombardment. The UN's humanitarian aid organisation OCHA called it the "largest cohort of child amputees in modern history".

Throughout the 17-month war, supplies and services for children and adults with amputations have fallen far short of demand. Gaza's ceasefire that began in mid-January offered a window for aid agencies to bring in an increased number of prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs, crutches and other devices. Still, it only covered about 20 per cent of the total need, said Loay Abu Saif, head of a disability programme run by the aid group Medical Aid for Palestine.

The window slammed shut when Israel barred entry of all medical supplies as well as food, fuel and other aid on 2 March. Israel's resumpton of its military campaign last week, has only added to the ranks of amputees.

Children struggle with multiple traumas. Sila's mother, father and sisters were all killed in an airstrike on her home in December 2023. A month of treatment had little effect, and Sila would scream in excruciating pain, her aunt Yasmine al-Ghofary said.

"I try as much as I can to make her happy. But the truth is, there's only so much she can be happy. Pain is pain, and amputation is amputation," al-Ghofary said. Sila sees other girls playing and tries to keep up with them using her walker but falls down. "She says, 'Why am I like this? Why am I not like them?" said al-Ghofary.

Last May, 13-year-old Moath Abdelaal's leg was amputated above the knee after an Israeli airstrike in the southern city of Rafah injured him
PHOTO: PTI

In October 2023, 11-year-old Reem lost her hand when an airstrike hit nearby as her family fled their home in Gaza City. Reem can no longer dress on her own, brush her hair or tie her shoes. She gets angry and hits her siblings if she can't find someone to help her, her mother said. Other times, she isolates herself and just watches other children playing.

"Once Reem told her dad that she wished to die," said her mother, Umm Reem. "In another instance, we were talking about meat, and she said, Slaughter me like a sheep,' and she was laughing."

Throughout the war, hospitals lacked medicines that could have averted amputations. Doctors describes cutting off limbs because of infections that should have been easily treated.

Gaza's Health Ministry on Monday put out a list of the names of more than 15,000 children, 17 and younger, killed by Israel's offensive. The list included nearly 5,000 children younger than 6, including 876 infants who had not reached a year in age.

Israel's offensive has killed more than 50,000 Palestinians of all ages and wounded more than 113,000, according to the ministry, which does not say how many were civilians or combatants. Israel says it is targeting Conditions in camps make it even harder for children.

Last May, 13-year-old Moath Abdelaal's leg was amputated above the knee after an Israeli airstrike in the southern city of Rafah. The family had to flee to a tent camp outside the neighboring city of Khan Younis. During the ceasefire, they moved back to their hometown Jabaliya but their home had been destroyed, so they live in a tent by the ruins. said his father, Hussein Abdelaal.

Moath's psychological state is worsening, his father said. Moving with crutches around the rubble is difficult. Doctors had to amputate more from his leg, almost up to his hip, because of complications. The boy learned that a number of his friends in the neighbourhood had been killed, Abdelaal said. "He has been having a hard time coping with his new situation. He's not sleeping well next to his siblings. It's difficult to see our son like that," said Abdelaal.

Some child amputees have been evacuated out of Gaza for treatment. But the pace of medical evacuations has remained slow, and was reduced after Israel's strikes last week. 13,000 patients are waiting their chance.

Asmaa al-Nashash wants her 11-year-old son Abdulrahman to go abroad for a prosthetic leg. The boy was selling items from a stand at a UN school-turned-shelter in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp when an airstrike hit, she said. Shrapnel tore through his leg, and doctors couldn't save it.

Since then, he often sits alone playing games on her phone because he can't play football with other children, she said. Other kids bully him, calling him the "one-legged boy".

"My heart gets torn into pieces when I see him like this and I can do nothing for him," she said. *—PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Syria loses hope amid violence during Ramadan

Sahar Diab had visited Damascus' famed Umayyad Mosque previously. But as the Syrian lawyer went there to pray during her country's first Ramadan after the end of the Assad family's iron-fisted rule, she felt something new, something priceless: A sense of ease.

"The rituals have become much more beautiful," she said. "Before, we were restricted in what we could say. Now, there's freedom." As Diab spoke, details were trickling in from outside Damascus about deadly clashes. Bloodshed took on sectarian overtones and devolved into the worst violence since former President Bashar Assad was overthrown in December by armed insurgents led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

This Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of daily fasting and heightened worship — such are the realities of a Syria undergoing complex transition. Relief, hope and joy at new openings — after 53 years of the Assad dynasty's reign, prolonged civil war and crushing economic woes — intermingle with uncertainty, fear by some, and a particularly bloody and worrisome wave of violence.

Some are feeling empowered, others vulnerable. Diab wants her country to be rebuilt and to get rid of Assad-era "corruption and bribery". At the Umayyad Mosque, the rituals were age-old: A woman fingering a prayer bead and kissing a copy of the Quran; the faithful standing shoulder-to-shoulder and prostrating in prayer.

The sermon, by contrast, was fiery in delivery and new in message. This Ramadan, Syrians marked the 14th anniversary of the start of their country's civil war. The conflict began as one of several popular uprisings against Arab dictators, before Assad crushed what started as largely peaceful protests and a civil war erupted.

It became increasingly fought along sectarian lines, drawing in foreign powers and fighters. Assad, who had ruled over a majority Sunni population, belongs to the minority Alawite sect and had drawn from Alawite ranks for military and security positions, fuelling resentment. Many Syrians speak of omnipresent fear under Assad, often citing the Arabic saying, "the walls have ears", reflecting that speaking up even privately didn't feel safe. They talk of hardships, injustices and brutality.

"They would harass us," said Ahmed Saad Aldeen, who came to the Umayyad Mosque from the city of Homs. "You go out and you don't know whether you'll return home or not." He said more than a dozen cousins are missing; a search for them in prisons proved futile. Mohammed Qudmani said even going to the mosque caused anxiety for some before, for fear of getting on security forces' radar screen or being labelled a "terrorist".

Now, Damascus streets are bedecked with the new three-starred flag, not long ago a symbol of Assad's opponents. It flutters from poles and is plastered to walls, sometimes with the words "God is great" handwritten on it. One billboard declares this the "Ramadan of victory." On a government building, the faces of former presidents Bashar and Hafez Assad are partly cut off from a painting; in their place, "The Freedom" is scribbled in Arabic.

Haidar, who owns a sweets shop, said he was touched that new security force members gave him water and dates while he was out when a call to prayer signaled that those fasting can eat and drink. "We never saw such things here," he said, adding that he used to recite Quranic verses for protection before passing through Assad's checkpoints. He said his business was doing well this Ramadan.

Many dream of a new Syria, but exactly how that would look remains uncertain. "The situation is foggy," said Damascus resident Wassim Bassimah. "Of course, there's great joy that we've gotten rid of the cancer we had, but there's also a lot of wariness." "The external enemies are still there," he said.

"So are the enemies from within." The war's scars are inescapable.

Just outside of Damascus, death and destruction are seared into some landscapes littered with pockmarked and ruined structures. Many Syrians grieve the missing and killed; many families have been divided by the exodus of millions as refugees.

Ramadan typically sees festive gatherings with loved ones to break the daily fast. But this month's violence in Syria's coastal region has stoked fears among some.

As the violence unfolded earlier this month, crowds gathered in Damascus. Occasionally, people who started off arguing would agree on something and join each other in chants.

"One. One. One," they yelled. "The Syrian people are one." *—PTI*

Just outside of Damascus, death and destruction are seared into landscapes littered with pockmarked and ruined structures
PHOTO: PTI

Kerala women bouncers thrive in the male-dominated field

Wearing a close-fitting black T-shirt and jeans, she walked confidently before superstar Mohanlal, clearing the path for him by efficiently managing the crowd.

Her tough looks and commanding gestures made her stand out among the male watch-and-ward staff escorting the actor when he attended a function in Kochi recently.

She is Anu Kunjumon, one of several women who are now breaking gender stereotypes by entering the long-standing, male-dominated profession of bouncers.

Bouncers are professional security personnel deployed to manage crowds during mass events, escort celebrities, provide personal security to those facing threats, handle party spoilers during DJ parties, and deal with troublemakers at pubs and bars.

Like Kunjumon, several women who are confident in their physical fitness and mental strength are now working as bouncers, a relatively new and unconventional profession in Kerala.

If anyone asks what made her choose a profession that women do not typically take up, Kunjumon would say that she has always liked to command people and earn their respect.

The 37-year-old would also say that she has always wanted to be mentally strong and physically powerful in life.

"I am a person who grew up fighting all kinds of challenges in my life. I had to strive to look after my mother and sister and to live a dignified life in society. But I overcame everything with my mental strength," she told PTI.

A photographer by profession, Kunjumon used to take photos at film promotional events and celebrity programmes as per the demands of clients.

She said that women photographers covering film promotions were also very rare when she began her career years ago. At one such event, she had an argument and altercation with a male bouncer, which ultimately led her to choose that profession.

"One of the bouncers pushed me while I was taking pictures at the function. I didn't like the way I was treated, so I gave him a strong push, which literally knocked him down. I later called the agency that supplied bouncers for the event and asked them why they don't hire women bouncers. I also expressed my interest in working as a female bouncer," she said.

She believes that a woman with strong willpower, mental strength, and a moderately fit body can excel as a bouncer.

Anu Kunjumon is one among several women who are now breaking gender stereotypes in Thiruvananthapuram. She was an entertainment photographer before working as a bouncer
PHOTO: PTI

During her years-long career, Kunjumon, who hails from Kochi, has worked as a bouncer at celebrity events and pub parties, as well as escorting female celebrities and business professionals.

"I have never felt any difficulty in managing crowds over the years. I have had to deal with troublemakers--men, women, and transgender individuals--in many situations. However, I have never had any bad experiences as a woman in such circumstances," the bouncer said with a smile.

She also stated that she is pursuing her job as a bouncer with the same passion as she had for photography.

> One of the bouncers pushed me while I was taking pictures at the function. I didn't like the way I was treated, so I gave him a strong push, which literally knocked him down. I later called the agency that supplied bouncers for the event and asked them why they don't hire women bouncers. I also expressed my interest in working as a female bouncer," she said. She believes that a woman with strong willpower, mental strength, and a moderately fit body can excel as a bouncer.

Another woman bouncer, who does not wish to be named, said they receive almost equal pay to their male counterparts for their services.

"We are hired based on the demands of clients. In the majority of award nights, celebrity events, and DJ parties, women bouncers are now a necessity," she told PTI.

However, she admitted that the lack of professional training is a major challenge for bouncers like her.

"I have been going to the gym for years and am very particular about keeping my body fit. But apart from that, I have not received any professional training to work as a bouncer or to meet the required responsibilities," the 32-year-old said.

Rakhee K George, who runs Bonfire Events, an event management company in Kochi, said there is no proper system in place to provide training for women bouncers.

"Many bouncer-supplying agencies simply send physically strong-looking women to events as per the clients' demands. Many women bouncers overcome challenges during work through their mental courage," she said.

Umesh Kumar, who runs a private security agency here, said they usually do not provide women bouncers due to the lack of trained personnel.

"It seems that the majority of such recruitments are done through gyms. Physically strong women, especially those with gym training, are deployed as bouncers by many agencies," he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

US lawmakers seek to sanction Pak Army Chief

NEW YORK, 26 MARCH

Two US lawmakers introduced a bill seeking to sanction Pakistan's Army chief General Asim Munir for engaging in the "wrongful persecution and imprisonment" of political opponents and the release of detainees including former premier Imran Khan. The "Pakistan Democracy Act" was introduced by Republican representative Joe Wilson and Democratic representative Jimmy Panetta on Monday, The Hill reported. The bipartisan bill would place sanctions on the military chief within 180 days under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. Violators can be subjected to denial of entry to the US and ineligibility for US visas. The bill gives the president the power to drop the sanctions if "military rule has ended in Pakistan". *—PTI*

Conviction of S Korea opposition leader overturned

NEW YORK, 26 MARCH

An appeals court in South Korea overturned an election law conviction against opposition leader Lee Jae-Myung Wednesday, potentially clearing the way for him to mount a presidential campaign. The courtroom victory comes as the country's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol could face an early exit due to his short-lived imposition of martial law. Surveys show Lee, leader of the main liberal opposition Democratic Party who narrowly lost the 2022 election to Yoon, as the early favourite. The Constitutional Court is deliberating on whether to formally dismiss or reinstate him. If he's removed, there will be an election to replace him within two months. Lee still faces four other criminal trials, none of which are likely to be resolved soon. *—PTI*

4 'facilitators' of Jaffar Express attack held in Pak

ISLAMABAD, 26 MARCH

The Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of Balochistan police has arrested four suspects who allegedly facilitated the terrorist group involved in hijacking the Jaffar Express and taking over 400 passengers' hostage in Pakistan's Bolan district on 11 March, according to a media report. Terrorists belonging to the banned separatist outfit Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) hijacked the Jaffar Express carrying 440 passengers. Twenty-six hostages, including 18 security personnel, lost their lives in the attack. Sources in CTD, while confirming the arrests, said that a joint team comprising senior officials from various law enforcement agencies is investigating. *—PTI*

Thai PM survives no-confidence motion

BANGKOK, 26 MARCH

Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra easily survived a no-confidence vote in Parliament on Wednesday, following a two-day debate in which rivals charged that she has mismanaged the country. Opposition lawmakers argued that she has been unduly influenced by her father, former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin is a popular but highly controversial political figure who was ousted in a 2006 military coup, fled into exile and recently returned to Thailand. Paetongtarn received 319 votes, with 161 voting against her and seven abstaining in the first no-confidence vote she faced since she took office last year after another Pheu Thai prime minister was removed by the Constitutional Court after it found he'd committed a serious ethical breach. *—PTI*

Kremlin, Kyiv agree to limited ceasefire

This will prevent attacks on energy infra

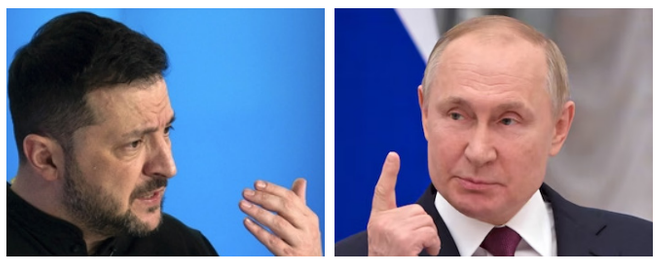
KYIV, 26 MARCH

After three days of separate talks on a 30-day ceasefire, Ukraine said it was ready to proceed with a ceasefire prohibiting attacks on energy infrastructure, while Moscow insisted it was already complying with it. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, in a video address late Tuesday that "Ukraine has agreed with US negotiators that a ceasefire for energy infrastructure can start today." But, he warned, any strikes on Ukraine's energy facilities by Moscow would draw "strong retaliation."

On Tuesday, White House said the sides had "agreed to ensure safe navigation, eliminate the use of force, and prevent the use of commercial vessels for military purposes in the Black Sea."

The 30-day ceasefire Moscow and Kyiv agreed to in principle last week, has thus far failed to materialise as both sides continue to launch drone and rocket attacks. While Zelenskyy on Tuesday thanked the US for its efforts to strike an agreement, a comprehensive peace deal to end the three-year war still looked distant. Kremlin warned that a potential Black Sea deal could only be implemented after sanctions against the Russian Agricultural Bank and other financial organisations are lifted. Zelenskyy whose hometown Kryvyi Rih came under Russian drone attack on Tuesday called it an example of Moscow "manipulating, twisting agreements". Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Putin's order to pause strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure for 30 days, given on 18 March per an agreement with Trump, still stands.

In an apparent reference to Moscow's demands, the US said it "will help restore Russia's access to the world market for agricultural and fertiliser exports, lower maritime insurance costs, and enhance access to ports and payment systems." *—PTI*



Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Vladimir Putincaption *PHOTO: X*

RUSSIA CONVICTS CAPTURED UKRAINIANS

Russia on Wednesday convicted 23 captured Ukrainians on terrorism charges stemming from the fighting in Ukraine in a trial that Kyiv denounced as a violation of international law. Ukraine's human rights envoy, Dmytro Lubinets, denounced the proceedings when they began in June 2023 as "another sham trial held for Russia's own amusement. Russia and fair justice have nothing in common. The world must respond to such shameful sham trials of Ukrainian defenders." —PTI

Citing India, Potus signs order to revamp polling

Donald Trump shows the executive order he signed *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW YORK, 26 MARCH

US President Donald Trump signed an executive order to overhaul the American election system akin to India and Brazil who have linked voter identification to a biometric database, while so far the US relies on self-attestation for citizenship. "Election fraud. You've heard the term. We're going to end it, hopefully. At least this will go a long way toward ending it," he said.

The order says the US has failed "to enforce basic and necessary election protections" and calls on states to co-operate with the White House or risk losing access to federal funding. "In tabulating votes, Germany and Canada require the use of paper ballots, counted in public by local officials, which substantially reduces the number of disputes as compared to the American patchwork of voting methods that can lead to basic chain-of-custody problems," the order stated.

The order also seeks to bar states from accepting postal ballots received after election day. Currently, 18 states allow ballots to be received after election day as long as they were mailed on or before the day of the vote. The order, which is expected to be challenged in Court, has experts weighing in that millions of Americans could be disenfranchised due to the rule as they do not have enhanced drivers' license or passport for identification. India is exploring linking voter cards with Aadhaar. *—PTI*

TRUMP DOWNPLAYS 'SECURITY BREACH'

Amidst calls for investigation into the serious security breach by top US administration officials, US National Security Adviser Mike Waltz has taken responsibility for a group chat in which high-ranking officials planned military strikes in Yemen in the company of a journalist who was inadvertently added.

US president Donald Trump told NBC News that the lapse "turned out not to be a serious one," and expressed his continued support for national security adviser Mike Waltz. "Michael Waltz has learned a lesson, and he's a good man," Trump said. He also appeared to point blame on an unnamed Waltz aide for Goldberg being added to the chain. "It was one of Michael's people on the phone. A staffer had his number on there." *—PTI*

Gazan anti-war and anti-Hamas protests in Beit Lahiya, in the northern Gaza Strip on 25 March *PHOTO: (X)*

Palestinians protest against Hamas

CAIRO, 26 MARCH

- Protesters held signs saying "Stop the war," "We refuse to die," and "The blood of our children is not cheap." Some could be heard chanting "Hamas out"

Hundreds of Palestinians gathered to protest against Hamas seeking an end to war, according to videos circulating online. It was a rare show of public anger against the militant group, which has long repressed dissent, jailed and tortured critics and still rules the territory 17 months into the war with Israel. The videos, showed hundreds of people taking part in an anti-war protest in the heavily destroyed northern town of Beit Lahiya on Tuesday.

People held signs saying "Stop the war," "We refuse to die," and "The blood of our children is not cheap." Some could be heard chanting: "Hamas out!" Other videos appeared to show Hamas supporters dispersing the crowds.

A statement released by family elders from Beit Lahiya expressed support for the protests against Israel's offensive and its tightened blockade. They also said the community fully supports armed resistance against Israel and rejects "any attempt to exploit legitimate popular demands by a fifth column," apparently referring to opponents of Hamas.

The protests erupted a week after Israel ended its ceasefire with Hamas by launching a surprise wave of strikes that killed hundreds of people. Earlier this month, Israel vowed to escalate the war until 59 hostages were released and halted deliveries of food, fuel, medicine and humanitarian aid to Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians.

Hamas has said it will only release the remaining captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. The war was triggered by Hamas' attack into Israel, in October 2023. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 50,000 people, caused vast destruction and displaced some 90 per cent of Gaza's population. *—PTI*

Aus to fund Asia & Pacific amid US aid cuts

MELBOURNE, 26 MARCH

- US announced major cuts to development and humanitarian aid abroad. Three-quarters of Australia's total overseas development aid will directly benefit the Indo-Pacific region, which is a 40-year high proportion

Australia plans to spend a larger share of its foreign aid on its neighbours in Asia and the Pacific islands after the United States announced major cuts to development and humanitarian aid abroad. Three-quarters of Australia's total overseas development aid will directly benefit the Indo-Pacific region, which is a 40-year high proportion, according to documents seen by The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Total aid for the fiscal year beginning July 1 is set to increase by only 136 million Australian dollars (USD 86 million) above the current year's spending to AUD 5.097 billion (USD 3.22 billion). Neither Foreign Minister Penny Wong nor Minister for International Development and the Pacific Pat Conroy mentioned Washington's foreshadowed cuts in explaining Australia's change in focus.

"Australia's development programme is central to ensuring the stability and security of our region. In these uncertain times, we are ensuring more of Australia's development assistance is going to the Pacific and Southeast Asia, where Australia's interests are most at stake," Wong said in a statement.

Conroy said Australia remained committed to multilateral aid channels despite Australia's shift toward direct bilateral aid deals. Australia will suspend or delay AUD 119 million (USD 75 million) in payments to the multinational UN Development Programme, the Global Partnership for Education and the Global Fund to Fight HIV, Malaria and TB. Riley Duke, a researcher with Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based international policy think tank, described Australia's aid budget as a response to expected reductions in US and European aid spending. "The shift in spending priorities indicated the government felt it needed to play a bigger role in the Pacific to secure the outcomes that Australia wants," he added. *—PTI*

EU URGES CITIZENS TO STOCKPILE 3 DAYS OF SUPPLIES

BRUSSELS, 26 MARCH

The European Union on Wednesday urged citizens across the continent to stockpile food, water and other essentials to last at least 72 hours as war, cyberattacks, climate change and disease increase the chances of a crisis. The call to action for the EU's 450 million citizens comes as the 27-nation bloc rethinks its security.

In recent years, the EU weathered the threat from Russia, including its attempts to exploit Europe's dependence on its natural gas to weaken support for Ukraine. NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has warned that Russia could be capable of launching another attack in Europe by 2030. "Today's threats facing Europe are more complex than ever," said Preparedness and Crisis Management Commissioner Hadja Lahbib as she unveiled a new strategy for dealing with future disasters while calling for better preparedness. *—PTI*

WILDFIRES GUT SOUTH KOREA

The remains of burnt-out pavilions due to wildfires are seen at the Gounsa temple in Uiseong, South Korea, on Wednesday. The wildfires, which started last Friday, have burned 43,330 acres *—PTI*

AMID BACKLASH

JD Vance to join wife on Greenland trip

WASHINGTON, 26 MARCH

US Vice President JD Vance has said that he's joining his wife on a Friday trip to Greenland, in a visit that will focus on national security and a visit to their space base amidst discontent shown by Governments in Greenland and Denmark becoming sharper.

"We're going to check out how things are going there," Vance said in a video shared Tuesday. "Speaking for President Trump, we want to reinvigorate the security of the people of Greenland because we think it's important to protecting the security of the entire world."

President Donald Trump irked much of Europe by suggesting that the United States should in some form control Greenland, its waterways and access to mineral rich resources. Ahead of the vice president's announcement that he would join his wife, Greenland government posted on Facebook Monday night that it had "not extended any invitations for any visits, neither private nor official." Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen told Danish national broadcasts Tuesday that it was "unacceptable pressure."

The office of second lady Usha Vance had said Sunday that she would depart Thursday for Greenland and return Saturday. Vance and one of her three children had planned to visit historic sites and learn about Greenland's culture, but her husband's participation has reoriented the trip around national security. The visit to Pituffik Space Base will take place instead of Usha's previously announced trip to Avannaata Qimussersu dogsled race in Sisimiut. Despite officials in Greenland and Denmark becoming more vocal in expressing objections, Vance is allowed to visit the space base, said Marc Jacobsen, a professor at the Royal Danish Defense College, because of a 1951 agreement between Denmark and the US regarding the defense of Greenland. *—PTI*

The Vance's trip comes after President Donald Trump irked Europe by suggesting that US should in some form control Greenland *PHOTO: X*

Indian-American scientist Bhattacharya is NIH head

NEW YORK, 26 MARCH

Indian-American scientist Jay Bhattacharya has been confirmed by the US Senate as the Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the country's top health research and funding institutions. Bhattacharya, a professor of Health Policy at Stanford University, was confirmed by a 53-47 vote on Tuesday, according to the official website of the US Senate.

Jay Bhattacharya *PHOTO: X*

US President Donald Trump, then the President-elect, nominated Bhattacharya as the 18th NIH Director in November last year. "Dr Bhattacharya will work in cooperation with Robert F Kennedy Jr to direct the Nation's Medical Research and to make important discoveries that will improve Health, and save lives," Trump had said.

Bhattacharya is a co-author of the Great Barrington Declaration, an alternative to lockdowns proposed in October 2020. His peer-reviewed research has been published in Economics, Statistics, Legal, Medical, Public Health, and Health Policy Journals. He holds an MD and PhD in Economics from Stanford University. During his hearing, Bhattacharya said he understands science and public health have become politicised, and many no longer trust health officials or experts, according to The Hill. The NIH should support science which is "replicable, reproducible, and generalisable," he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

Gold snaps 4-day losing streak, Rs 90,685 per 10 g

New Delhi, 26 March

Cutting short the four-day losing streak, gold prices rebounded by Rs 235 to Rs 90,685 per 10 on Wednesday amid firm global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose by Rs 235 to Rs 90,235 per 10g against the previous close of Rs 90,000 per 10 grams. Traders said fresh buying by retailers after recent losses led to the recovery in gold prices. Firm global trends also influenced the sentiment, they said. Spot gold traded 0.16 per cent higher at USD 3,024.96 per ounce in the global markets. *—PTI*

Rupee rises 3 paise to close at 85.69 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

The rupee pared its initial losses and settled for the day higher by 3 paise at 85.69 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, supported by a resurgence of foreign fund inflows. Forex dealers said the rupee is facing renewed pressure on liquidity constraints, concerns over reciprocal tariff implementations and month-end demand for the US currency from importers. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.71 then touched an intraday high of 85.68 and a low of 85.98 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.69 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 3 paise from its previous closing level. On Tuesday, the rupee snapped its seven-session rally and settled with a loss of 11 paise at 85.72 against the US dollar. *—PTI*

Airtel launches IPTV services across 2,000 cities

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Bharti Airtel, one of India's leading telecommunications service providers, launched its IPTV services in 2,000 cities in India offering customers the best large screen viewing experience. Customers will get access to an extensive library of on-demand content from 29 prominent Streaming Apps including Netflix, Apple TV+, Amazon Prime, SonyLiv, Zee5, 600 popular television channels, and Wi-Fi service at plans starting Rs. 699. As an introductory offer, all Airtel customers will get up to 30 days of free service on the purchase of IPTV plans which can be availed through the Airtel Thanks App. All new customers can enjoy IPTV on the purchase of new Wi-Fi plans. Customers can visit the website https://www.airtel.in/ or walk into any of Airtel stores existing Airtel Wi-Fi customers can upgrade their plan to IPTV plans through Airtel thanks app or visit any Airtel store. *—Salar News*

Govt introduces weekly wheat stock reporting

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The government has introduced a mandatory weekly wheat stock reporting requirement for traders, wholesalers, retailers and processors across the country, starting 1 April, to manage food security and prevent market speculation. Under the directive, all legal entities must declare their wheat stock positions on the government's online portal every Friday until further notice, according to an official statement on Tuesday. The wheat stock limit currently in place is set to expire on 31 March. The Department of Food and Public Distribution will closely monitor the disclosures to control prices and ensure consistent wheat availability throughout the country. Entities not yet registered on the portal are urged to do so immediately and begin their weekly stock reporting, according to the statement. *—PTI*

RBI likely to continue repo rate cuts

Raises concerns on whether 'US exceptionalism', a phase of strong economy, may be fading

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is expected to continue reducing the repo rate as economic growth faces potential headwinds and inflation is likely to fall in the central bank's target range, according to a report by HDFC Mutual Fund.

The report highlighted that global growth momentum shows risk of slowing, particularly as economic conditions in the US begin to show signs of softening. It noted that while US economic growth has remained relatively stable, recent data points, including Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), consumption spending and the housing sector, indicate a gradual slowdown.

"Policy uncertainty and escalating trade tensions under the new US administration might weigh on growth over time. Thus, there is increasing risk of global growth momentum decelerating," it said.

Report highlighted that global growth momentum shows risk of slowing, particularly as economic conditions in the US begin to show signs of softening *PHOTO: X*

The report raised concerns about whether the period of "US exceptionalism"--a phase of strong economic outperformance--may be fading. In this context, the report said "RBI is likely to continue cutting repo rate as growth is likely to slow down while inflation is expected to durably align closer to target".

The report adds that inflation is expected to remain close to the central bank's target, aided by stable core inflation and a favourable base effect. These factors provide room for the central bank to maintain an accommodative monetary policy stance.

Another key observation in the report is the changing trend in banking credit growth. In the FY24 and the first half of FY25, bank credit growth was significantly higher than deposit growth.

To ensure sufficient liquidity, the RBI has already infused or announced plans to inject approximately Rs 5.8 trillion since early December 2024.

With these measures, durable liquidity in the system is expected to rise to over Rs 1.5 trillion by the end of FY25. *—ANI*

RBI GUV BATS FOR REGULATIONS WITH NO BARRIERS FOR INCLUSION

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Wednesday said regulations should not create "unintended barriers" for deepening financial inclusion.

Speaking at the Financial Action Task Force event, Malhotra said policymakers should also be mindful and not be "overzealous" with their measures, adding that legitimate activities should not be stifled.

India has made substantial progress on financial inclusion with 94 per cent of adults now having a bank account, Malhotra said.

The laws and regulations have to target only the illegitimate and the illicit with "surgical precision", Malhotra said.

Pitching for "balanced regulations", Malhotra said adopting a risk-based approach would be beneficial and added that assessing impact on people and businesses is essential. *—PTI*

NIFTY DROPS 0.77%

After 7 days, Bear knocks down Bull as Sensex falls by 0.93%

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

Stock markets snapped the seven-day winning run on Wednesday with benchmark Sensex tanking 728 points due to profit-taking in banking and IT shares ahead of monthly expiry of derivatives contracts.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 728.69 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 77,288.50 as 25 of its components closed in the red. During the day, it slumped 822.97 points or 1.05 per cent to 77,194.22.

The NSE Nifty dropped 181.80 points or 0.77 per cent to 23,486.85.

In the past seven trading days, the BSE benchmark index jumped 4,188.28 points or 5.67 per cent. The Nifty surged 1,271.45 points or 5.67 per cent during the same period.

From the Sensex pack, NTPC, Tech Mahindra, Zomato, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finance, Infosys, Maruti, State Bank of India, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Reliance Industries, Hindustan Unilever, and HDFC Bank were the losers.

IndusInd Bank, HCL Tech, Titan, Mahindra & Mahindra and Power Grid were the gainers.

Among Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower.

The BSE smallcap gauge declined 1.45 per cent and midcap dipped 0.67 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, oil & gas dropped the most by 1.52 per cent, followed by realty (1.37 per cent), utilities (1.32 per cent), energy (1.29 per cent), bankex (1.08 per cent), BSE Focused IT (1.12 per cent), IT (1.11 per cent) and teck (0.77 per cent).

Capital Goods emerged as the only gainer.

As many as 3,115 stocks declined while 919 advanced and 109 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 5,371.57 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

- The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 728.69 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 77,288.50 as 25 of its components closed in the red.

Sebi puts WeWork India's IPO in 'abeyance'

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Sebi has put the initial public offering (IPO) of premium flexible workspace operator WeWork India Management Ltd in "abeyance", an update with the markets regulator showed.

The Embassy Group-promoted firm, which filed its draft IPO papers on 31 January, planned to offer 4.37 crore shares through an Offer for Sale (OFS) route, under which Embassy Buildcon LLP and investor 1 Ariel Way Tenant Ltd proposed to offload shares, said the draft red herring prospectus.

Without specifying reasons, Sebi posted on its website that the "issuance of observations (has been) kept in abeyance."

In its draft papers, the company stated that the object of the offer is to achieve the benefits of listing the equity shares on the stock exchanges.

Launched in 2017, WeWork India Management is a leading premium flexible workspace operator in the country. It provides flexible, high-quality workspaces to customers, which include companies of all sizes -- large enterprises, small and mid-size businesses, startups, as well as individuals.

It leases primarily Grade A office space from leading developers across Tier 1 cities and design, build, and operates them as flexible workspaces.

WeWork India has played a significant role in the growth of the flexible workspace sector in India. *—PTI*

Sebi penalises 8 entities for non-genuine trades

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Capital markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) on Wednesday imposed penalties totalling Rs 40 lakh on eight entities for indulging in non-genuine trades in the illiquid stock options segment on the BSE.

In eight separate orders, the watchdog slapped fines of Rs 5 lakh each on Dwitiya Trading Ltd, Vineeta Kabra, Puneet Sabharwal HUF, Hemant Purshotamdas Gopani HUF, Mudrikaben Pareshkumar Shah, Gopalkrishna Ratanlal Shah HUF, Prabir Saha, and Sudha Jain.

The orders came after Sebi observed large-scale reversal of trades in the illiquid stock options segment of BSE, leading to the creation of artificial volume. Thereafter, Sebi conducted a probe into the trading activities of certain entities in illiquid stock options on BSE for the period from April 2014 to September 2015.

Sebi observed large-scale reversal of trades in the illiquid stock options segment of BSE *PHOTO: ANI*

According to Sebi, reversal trades are the trades in which an entity reverses its buy or sell positions in a contract with subsequent sell or buy positions with the same counterparty. The reversal trades are alleged to be non-genuine trades as they lack basic trading rationale and allegedly lead to a false or misleading appearance of trading, leading to the generation of artificial volume, the regulator said in the order.

In a separate order on Wednesday, the regulator suspended the certificate of registration granted to Sumit Kumar Waghmare for six months for flouting investment adviser rules. *—PTI*

PHOTO:FREEPIK

'India's worst phase of economy over'

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The worst phase of India's economic slowdown and earnings decline is likely over according to the global financial firm Goldman Sachs.

However, it expects market volatility to continue because of high domestic investment in small and mid-cap stocks and global uncertainties, particularly from tariffs.

In a report, the firm maintained a "Market Weight" stance within the emerging markets category. The report highlighted that the NIFTY 50 index has corrected by 10 per cent from its peak in September 2024.

This decline was driven by a slowdown in earnings growth due to weaker macroeconomic conditions and a sharp reduction in valuation multiples across sectors.

Analysts noted that earnings per share expectations for FY26 have been cut by an average of 7 per cent. Goldman Sachs' economists project that India's real GDP growth could improve to 6.4 per cent in the second half of 2025. *—ANI*

Over 5% of wealthy Indians want to migrate out

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

At least 22 per cent super rich Indians wish to leave the country due to factors like living conditions here, better standard of life abroad and also easier business environment in other countries, a survey said on Wednesday.

The survey of 150 ultra high networth individuals said that the US, UK, Australia, Canada and even UAE due to its golden visa scheme are the favourite destinations where the rich prefer to settle down.

Kotak Private, a leading wealth manager in the country which undertook the survey in association with consultancy EY, said 25 lakh Indians migrate to other countries every year as per the foreign ministry.

"One in five ultra HNIs surveyed are currently in the process of or plan to migrate," the survey findings said, adding most of them intend to reside in their host country of choice permanently while retaining their Indian citizenship.

They seek improved standard of living, healthcare solutions, education or lifestyle, the survey said, adding that over two-thirds said smoothening of business operations is a key driver for them.

Calling the migration decision as an "investment in the future", the survey also said that pursuit of excellent higher education for their children leads them to make the choice.

PHOTO:FREEPIK

Kotak Mahindra Bank's president Gautami Gavankar said the decision to migrate should not be seen as a flight of capital out of the country, pointing out that the caps on such activities ensure that the money does not flow out even if a person changes residency.

She said an Indian citizen residing in India can only take out USD 250,000 per year, while a non-resident is allowed USD 1 million, which ensures that there is no flight of capital.

The survey said the professionals show a higher propensity to migrate than the entrepreneurs or inheritors, while from an age group perspective, it is UHINs in the 36-40 years and above 61 years who are more keen to migrate.

There were 2.83 lakh Indians who can be tagged as UHNIs in 2023, with each having a net worth of over Rs 25 crore and their aggregate wealth was pegged at Rs 2.83 lakh crore. The same is expected to grow to 4.3 lakh individuals possessing a wealth of Rs 359 lakh crore by 2028, as per the survey.

Factors like higher consumption, the demographics, and strong economic growth will help in the growth of this segment, the survey said.

From a spending perspective, health and wellness has emerged as a key area especially after the pandemic, it said, adding that 81 per cent have reported an increase in their spends under the category. *—PTI*

MOST SECURE APP

What is Signal, app used by US officials to share war plans?

LONDON, 26 MARCH

A magazine journalist's account of being added to a group chat of US national security officials coordinating plans for airstrikes has raised questions about how highly sensitive information is supposed to be handled.

Atlantic Editor-In-Chief Jeffrey Goldberg detailed a discussion that happened over the Signal messaging app hours before strikes on Iran-backed Houthi-rebels in Yemen ordered by US President Donald Trump.

The National Security Council has since said the text chain "appears to be authentic" and that it is looking into how a journalist's number was added to the chain.

HERE'S A LOOK AT THE APP IN QUESTION

WHAT IS SIGNAL?

It's an app that can be used for direct messaging and group chats as well as phone and video calls.

Signal uses end-to-end encryption for its messaging and calling services that prevents any third-party from viewing conversation content or listening in on calls.

In other words, messages and calls sent on Signal are scrambled and only the sender and recipient at each end will have the key to decipher them.

Signal's encryption protocol is open source, meaning that it's freely available for anyone to inspect, use or modify. The encryption protocol is also used by another popular chat service, social media company Meta's WhatsApp platform.

Encryption on Signal is turned on by default, unlike another popular messaging app, Telegram, which requires users to turn it on and does not make it available for group chats.

IS IT SECURE?

Signal touts the privacy of its service and its head defended the app's security practices on Tuesday.

"Signal is the gold standard in private comms," Meredith Whittaker, president of Signal, said on X, without directly addressing the Atlantic report.

Experts agree Signal is more secure than conventional texting.

But it could be hacked.

Government officials have used Signal for organisational correspondence, such as scheduling sensitive meetings, but in the Joe Biden administration, people who had permission to download it on their White House-issued phones were instructed to use the app sparingly, according to a former national security official who served in the administration.

DO OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS USE SIGNAL?

Encrypted messaging apps are increasingly popular with government officials, according to a recent Associated Press review.

State, local and federal officials in nearly every state have accounts on encrypted messaging apps, according to the review, which found many of those accounts registered to government cellphone numbers. Some were also registered to personal numbers.

WHO'S BEHIND SIGNAL?

The app's origins date back more than a decade, when it was set up by an entrepreneur who goes by the name Moxie Marlinspike, who was briefly head of product security at Twitter after he sold his mobile security startup to the social media company.

Marlinspike merged two existing open-source apps, one for texting and one for voice calls, to create Signal.

The nonprofit Signal Foundation was set up in 2018 to support the app's operations as well as "investigate the future of private communication", according to the foundation's website.

The foundation says it is a nonprofit "with no advertisers or investors, sustained only by the people who use and value it".

The foundation's board has five members, including Brian Acton, who co-founded WhatsApp and donated USD 50 million to set up the foundation. *—PTI*

LSG wary of Hyderabad's aggressive batting approach

LSG will be required to have clear bowling plans

HYDERABAD, 26 MARCH

Having lost their opening clash, Rishabh Pant's Lucknow Super Giants will be wary of Sunrisers Hyderabad's ultra-aggressive approach with the bat when the two teams face off in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

Last year's runner-up SRH picked up from where they had left off in the opening clash to nearly break the record of the highest total in the IPL, handing the Rajasthan Royals a crushing defeat by 44 runs.

The huge win also propelled SRH to the top of the points table for having the best net run rate. Given their all-around firepower, the Pat Cummins-led side would want to maintain their dominance in the competition.

SRH went hammer and tongs against RR with their recruit Ishan Kishan smacking a century and the other big guns firing as usual to make 286/6 in their last outing here at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Uppal.

Such a batting approach could be terrifying for opponents, and SRH's remarkable consistency makes them the most feared batting unit in the IPL circuit.

The addition of Kishan to the mix of SRH's premier weapons in Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, and Heinrich Klaasen is another masterstroke. To top it off, Nitish Kumar Reddy too struck his runs at more than 200 against the Rajasthan Royals. Kishan appeared to be a man on a mission as he struck his maiden century in the IPL after being let go by Mumbai Indians, smashing six sixes and 11 fours in his 47-ball 106 not out.

In such circumstances, LSG will be required to have clear bowling plans as the smallest of errors is proving costly in the IPL, which has already witnessed a new record being made, 119 sixes have been struck in the first five matches.On their part, LSG, who lost to Delhi Capitals by one wicket in a thrilling finish, showed a similar approach with the bat, but they were guilty of losing their way in the middle overs, which proved to be costly. LSG lost six wickets and added only 76 runs in their last eight overs against Delhi Capitals.

Ishan Kishan and Pat Cummins are the key players in SRH ranks
PHOTO: PTI

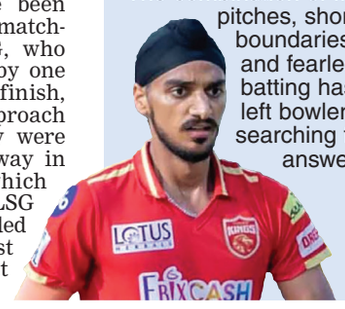
LSG VS SRH

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	4
LSG Won:	3
SRH Won:	1

LSG vs SRH Match starts at **7.30 pm IST**

No fixed par score in T20s: Arshdeep Singh

With batters dictating terms and record totals tumbling, Punjab Kings pacer Arshdeep Singh believes the concept of a "par score" has become irrelevant in modern-day T20 cricket. Speaking to reporters after a high-scoring clash, Arshdeep remarked, "There is no par score anymore. With pitches favoring batters and teams packed with power-hitters, even 200-plus totals are being chased with ease. Bowlers need to constantly evolve." IPL 2025 has witnessed a flurry of run-fests, with teams routinely surpassing the 200-run mark. The combination of flat pitches, shorter boundaries, and fearless batting has left bowlers searching for answers.



Varun and Moeen pick two wickets each as KKR restrict RR to 151/9
PHOTO: X

Varun, Moeen, stop RR to 151/9 on a sluggish track

GUWAHATI, 26 MARCH

Kolkata Knight Riders' spin duo of Varun Chakravarthy and Moeen Ali worked in perfect tandem to weave their magic, as a disciplined bowling effort restricted Rajasthan Royals to a below-par 151/9 in their IPL clash here on Wednesday.

KKR's new spin combination, brought together due to Sunil Narine's injury, proved to be their game-changer.

Chakravarthy and Ali dismantled the Royals' middle order, picking up two wickets each in successive overs right after the powerplay, shifting the momentum in KKR's favour. Chakravarthy, varying his pace masterfully, bowled out his quota with exceptional figures of 2/17, while Ali finished with a tidy 2/23 from his four overs. Seamer Vaibhav Arora (2/33) was expensive but chipped in with two crucial wickets regular Royals skipper Samson (13 off 11) with a yorker in the powerplay before dismissing impact substitute Shubham Dubey (9) cheaply. —*PTI*

> Supremely impressed by the quality of youngsters in the Punjab Kings squad as well as the Indian T20 set up on the sidelines of the IPL
>
> -Marcus Stoinis
> Australian all-rounder

> Shreyas Iyer continues to evolve his game while adjusting brilliantly to challenges such as facing short balls
>
> -Kane Williamson,
> New Zealand stalwart

BCCI has no plans to increase teams in WPL

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Women's Premier League has "grown phenomenally" in the last three years, but there are no immediate plans to increase the number of teams from the existing five, IPL chairman Arun Dhumal, who is also a part of the WPL committee, has said. The WPL committee is headed by BCCI president Roger Binny. The Board had plans to increase the number of teams after three seasons, but it now wants to consolidate. "To further strengthen this tournament for the time being, we want to consolidate before we take a call on further addition of any team.—*PTI*

Boxing Federation of India elections postponed

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on Wednesday postponed its election scheduled for 28 March, saying it's "impossible to complete the process within the originally planned timelines" after the Delhi and Himachal Pradesh High Courts directed the body to reinstate the names omitted from the electoral college."This is to inform you that the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Boxing Federation of India (BFI), which was scheduled to be held on 28.03.2025, stands postponed," BFI said in a notification to its member units.The BFI added that the decision to postpone the AGM, during which election of the office bearers was to be held. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Yuki Tsunoda to replace Liam Lawson at Red Bull

DUBAI, 26 MARCH

Yuki Tsunoda will partner world champion Max Verstappen at the Japanese Grand Prix following Red Bull's decision to sack struggling Liam Lawson after just two races, reports claimed Tuesday. The 24-year-old Tsunoda will be promoted from Red Bull's sister team RB for his home race at Suzuka on April 4-6, Dutch newspaper Telegraaf and French broadcaster Canal+ said. Red Bull was unavailable for comment when approached by AFP on Tuesday. New Zealander Lawson, 23, who was drafted in from RB in the winter to replace Sergio Perez, has endured a miserable start to the 2025 season.—*PTI*

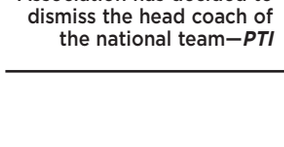


PHOTO: X

Paulo sacked as UAE soccer team head coach

DUBAI, 26 MARCH

Paulo Bento has been fired as head coach of the United Arab Emirates soccer team just hours after a 2-1 win Tuesday over North Korea kept alive its slim automatic hopes of qualification for the 2026 World Cup. That victory, which came with a goal in the 98th minute, puts the UAE four points behind second-place Uzbekistan in Group A with two games remaining. The top two teams from each of the three Asian groups are guaranteed a place in the tournament to be hosted next year by the United States, Canada, and Mexico. "The UAE Football Association has decided to dismiss the head coach of the national team—*PTI*

MOST LUCRATIVE TOURNAMENT

FIFA announces $1B prize money pool, $125M for winner

DUBAI, 26 MARCH

FIFA has revealed the prize money for the 2025 Club World Cup, making it the most lucrative club tournament ever.

The winners can earn up to 125 million USD.

A total of 1 billion USD will be shared among the 32 participating clubs. An additional 250 million USD is set aside to support club football worldwide. This tournament will feature a seven-match group stage and playoff format, with all revenue going directly to club football. The revamped FIFA Club World Cup, which has been expanded to 32 teams, will take place in the United States between 14 June and 13 July. FIFA has also introduced a major solidarity investment programme to further the sport's global growth. The organisation will not retain any revenue from the event, and its reserves will remain untouched, ensuring long-term investment in football across its 211 Member Associations. —*PTI*

The 2025 FIFA Club World Cup will feature a seven-match group stage and playoff format
PHOTO: X

Miami Open: Aryna, Paolini into SFs

MIAMI, 26 MARCH

World number one Aryna Sabalenka battled back in the second set to blast her way into the semi-finals of the 2025 Miami Open with a 6-2, 7-5 win over China's Zheng Qinwen on Tuesday.

The victory gives Sabalenka her first place in the last four at Miami, with a clash against Italy's Jasmine Paolini standing between her and a place in the final.

It looked like it was going to be routine business for the Belarussian against the ninth-seed Zheng when Sabalenka took the first set comfortably.

But Zheng had worked something out between sets and came out firing, breaking Sabalenka twice to open up a 4-2 lead in the set.

Sabalenka was in real trouble at 0-40 down but, after some signs of anger, was able to fight back to hold for 4-4 and then turned her aggression into a powerful finale.

Djokovic advances to QFs with dominant win over Musetti

Novak Djokovic delivered a commanding performance to defeat Lorenzo Musetti 6-2, 6-2 and reach the Miami Open quarter-finals.

The Serbian won 12 of the final 14 games after a serve clock dispute appeared to ignite his momentum, Reuters reported. Backed by a supportive crowd, Djokovic sealed the match as Musetti double-faulted on match point.

He will next face American Sebastian Korda, who defeated Gael Monfils in three sets.

Elsewhere, Francisco Cerundolo beat Casper Ruud 6-4, 6-2 to set up a clash with Grigor Dimitrov. —*PTI*

Indian shooters leave for Buenos Aires WC

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

The first batch of 22 Indian shooters, accompanied by 13 support staff, left for Buenos Aires on Wednesday to participate in the year's first ISSF World Cup, which will begin from April 3 in the Argentine capital.

It will be a combined World Cup in which competitions will be held in all the three disciplines of rifle, pistol and shotgun shootings.

A total of 35 Indian shooters will participate across 15 medal events including 12 individual and three mixed team competitions.

Double Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker is the only athlete to have cut two individual events. —*PTI*

NZ thrashes Pak by 8 wickets to seal T20I series

WELLINGTON, 26 MARCH

Tim Seifert's explosive unbeaten 97 off 38 balls powered New Zealand to a dominant eight-wicket victory over Pakistan in the final T20I in Wellington, clinching the series 4-1.

Chasing 129, Seifert set the tone with 18 runs off the first over despite being hit on the body.

He smashed six fours and 10 sixes, including 25 runs in the sixth over. Finn Allen contributed a quick 27 off 12 before falling at 93-1 in the seventh over. Mark Chapman departed for three, but Seifert and Daryl Mitchell (2*) guided New Zealand to 131-2 in just 9.4 overs.

Pakistan struggled to 128-9 after opting to bat. Reduced to 52-5, captain Salman Agha (51 off 39) and Shadab Khan (28 off 20) stitched a 54-run stand. Jimmy Neesham was the standout bowler, taking 5-22, his maiden T20I five-wicket haul. Jacob Duffy (2-18) inflicted early damage, dismissing Hasan Nawaz and Omair Yousuf.

Pakistan made five changes for the match, while New Zealand brought in Ben Sears for Zak Foulkes.

Pakistan pacer Haris Rauf has joined the ODI squad in New Zealand after initially being dropped from the format for a three-match series against the Black Caps.

The teams will now face off in a three-match ODI series starting Saturday in Napier.

New Zealand 131 for 2 (Seifert 97*) beat Pakistan 128 for 9 (Agha 51, Neesham 5-22) by eight wickets—*PTI*

EXHIBITION MATCH

Messi and Argentine team are visiting India in October

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Football fans in India will have another glimpse of Lionel Messi and his Argentine team in an exhibition match in Kerala in 14 October, years after the World Cup-winning captain first visited the country.In November last year, Kerala Sports Minister V Abdurahiman had announced the news of Argentina visiting the southern state and playing two friendly matches in Kochi.

On Wednesday, HSBC India became the official partner of the Argentine team to collaborate and promote football in India, and announced that the match will be held in October.

"Under this partnership, the Argentina national football team, including legendary player Lionel Messi, will visit India for an international exhibition match in October 2025," a release from HSBC India said. "The Argentine Football Association (AFA) and HSBC have today announced the signing of a new one-year partnership for India and Singapore, covering the competitive season in 2025 ahead of the 2026 World Cup qualification final matches." Messi's first visit to India was to play a World Cup qualifying round match against Venezuela in Kolkata in September 2011. Argentina won that match 1-0 at Salt Lake Stadium. Sandeep, Head International Wealth and Premier Banking HSBC India, said: "As we join forces with one of the most revered teams in the world of football. —*PTI*

World Cup 2026: Argentina qualify

Argentina will get the chance to defend its World Cup title in 2026 after becoming the first South American team to qualify for the tournament in the United States, Canada, and Mexico next year. After Bolivia's 0-0 draw with Uruguay at El Alto, Argentina beat Brazil 4-1 in front of 85,000 fans at the Monumental de Nunez Stadium on Tuesday despite the absence of Lionel Messi.

Maradona's former custodian was arrested

LONDON, 26 MARCH

Julio Coria left the courtroom in the Buenos Aires suburb of San Isidro in handcuffs after judges ruled in favor of the prosecution's claim that he had lied under oath.

Julio Coria former bodyguard was present in the house where Maradona died under conditions prosecutors say amounted to negligence, and had tried to revive him with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, according to evidence before the court. Maradona died on 25 November 2020, at age 60, while recovering at home from brain surgery for a blood clot. He had battled cocaine and alcohol addiction for decades. His seven-person medical team is on trial for what prosecutors have called the "horror theater" of the final days of his life. Jana, one of the players' five children who is a plaintiff in the case along with her siblings and Maradona's sisters, told the court that she and her sister Gianinna had visited their father a week before his death, but that he was "in bad humor." —*PTI*